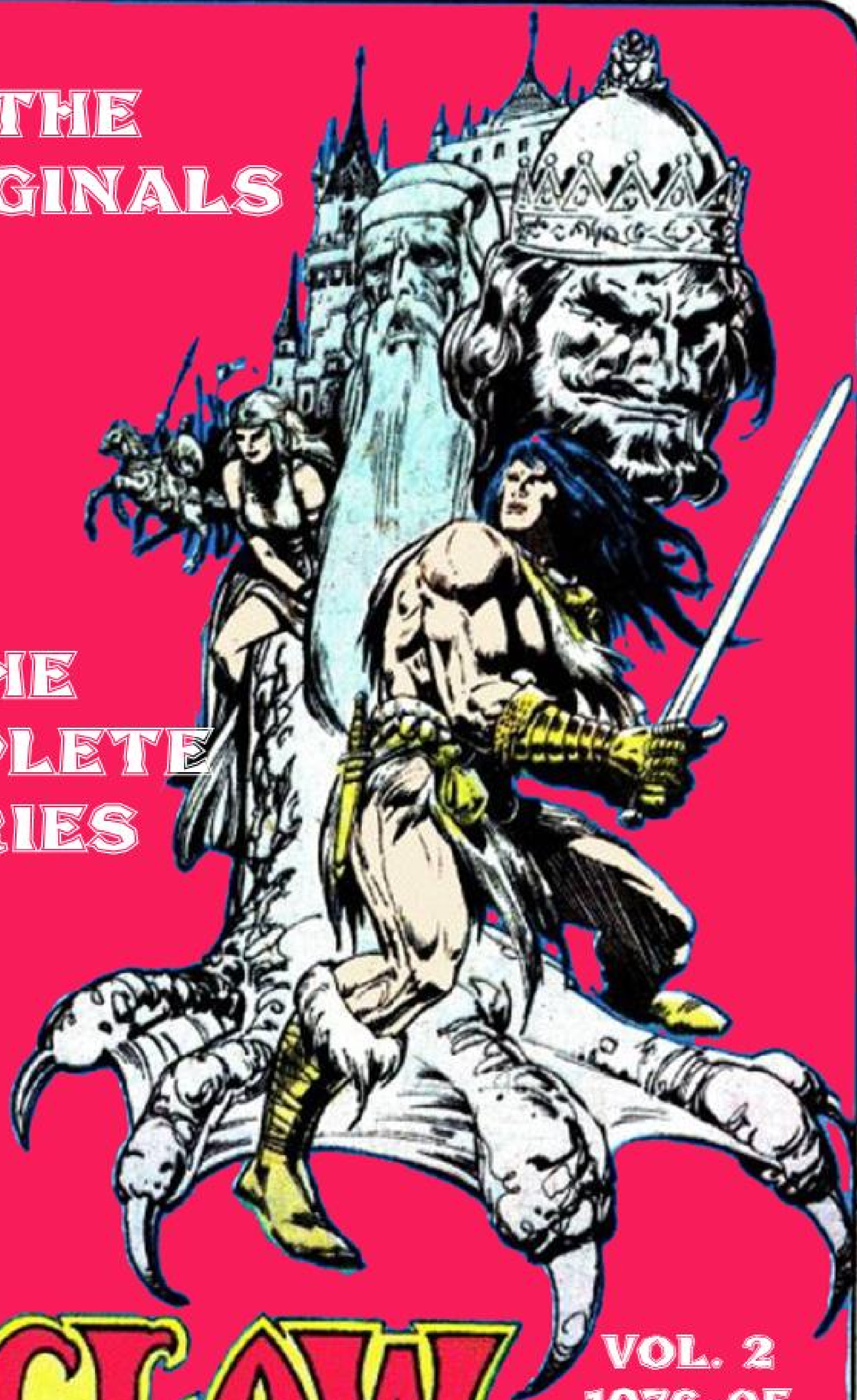
THE ORIGINALS

THE COMPLETE SERIES



VOL. 2
1976-05
1978-08

BIBLIOTHECA
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DC COMICS SALUTES THE BICENTENNIAL 18



CLAW THE UNCONQUERED



THE BLAZING BLADE OF CLAW--LOST IN A FORBIDDEN REALM!

30¢ NO. 8 AUG. 32474

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

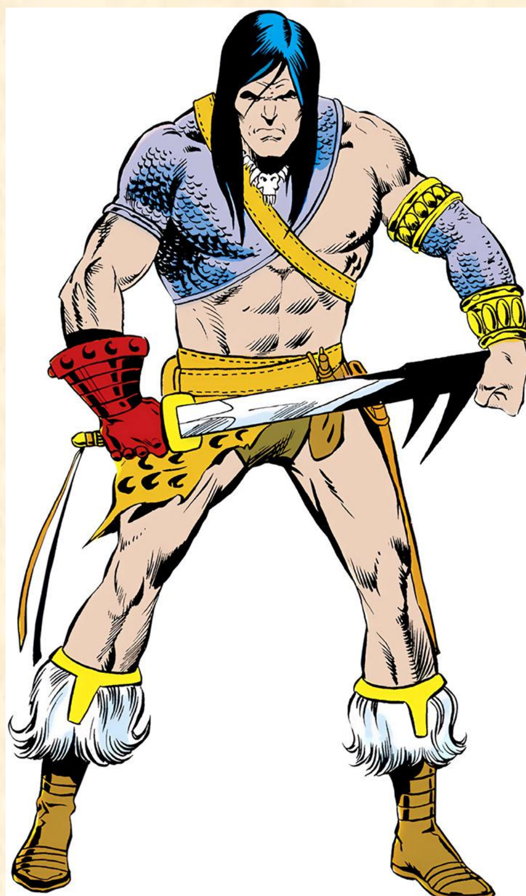
CLAW THE UNCONQUERED

SPEAK, MONSTER-- YOU WILL HOLD MY SECRET FROM ME NO LONGER!



DEATH DUEL WITH MAHAN K'HANDA-- MAN-WORM MASTER OF THE 7TH VOID!

David Michelinie (1948) est l’un de ces nombreux scénaristes qui ont fait une longue carrière dans l’industrie des comics sans rien écrire d’indigne ni que l’on se sente obligé de crier au génie. C’est souvent correct, quelques fois excellent et parfois franchement loupé. *Son Claw, the Unconquered* se situe dans cette moyenne. Œuvre de commande, censée pasticher Conan, de ce côté-là c’est réussi, elle oblique avec l’arrivée d’un nouveau dessinateur vers la SF avec notamment des réminiscences de Galactus



Ernie Chan (1940-2009) avait été l’assistant de John Buscema (1927-2002) dont le dessin avait porté Conan au pinacle commercial. Ce n’est donc pas un hasard s’il avait été choisi tant son style fait penser à celui du maître, un ton en dessous toutefois.

On retrouve son nom autant chez Marvel que chez DC, parfois orthographié Chua. Né aux Philippines, il devient Chua suite à une erreur de transcription sur son bulletin de naissance. À son arrivée aux Etats-Unis en 1970 c’est sous ce nom que paraitront ses premières planches. Le nom sera corrigé quand il obtiendra la nationalité américaine en 1976.

Keith Giffen (1952) qui prit la suite à compter du #8 a également fait une longue carrière dans les comics. On peu dire de lui ce qui a été dit de Michelinie quelques lignes plus haut : Ni tâcheron, ni génie

Au moment où il entame Claw c’est encore un jeune dessinateur dont le style s’affirmera davantage avec l’expérience.

 la suite du succès de *Conan le Barbare* chez Marvel, DC Comics riposte et crée une succession de sagas telles que *Sword of Sorcery* (1973) ou encore *Warlord* (1976). À celles-ci d'autres suivront à l'instar d'*Arak*, *Son of Thunder* (1981), *Dragonlance* (1988) ou encore *Atlantis Chronicles* (1990) mais aucune ne sera à la hauteur des espérances du grand public, hormis *Dragonlance*.



Claw vit dans un monde qui n’est évidemment pas sans rappeler celui de Conan dont la carte fait un peu penser à l’extrême sud du continent américain, le rio de la Plata local étant coincé entre la Pytharie (Pytharia en vo) et le Boske.

Le héros est lui-même pytharien, (soit dit en passant il vaut mieux être pytharien que bon à rien !) et ne s’appelle pas évidemment Claw mais répond au nom de Valcan

Il a hérité de ce surnom de Claw (« Griffe » par ce que sa main droit n’est pas une main mais une patte griffue.

Encore une histoire d’héritage !

Le papa avait appelé un démon, un truc à ne pas faire , les choses avaient mal tourné et en



punition sa main droite fut transformé en griffe, la malédiction se transmettant aux enfants.

Vous parlez d'une histoire !

À l'issue du #9 (octobre 1976) qui révélait justement les raisons de la malédiction, la publication est interrompue jusqu'en mai 1978, ce qui n'est jamais un bon signe. La revue s'arrête définitivement avec le #12 alors que les #13 et 14 étaient déjà rédigés et dessinés.

Le personnage réapparaitra en 2006 dans une mini série avec Red Sonja chez Dynamite Comics. La même année Chuck Dixon lance une autre mini-série chez WildStorm, alors filiale californienne de DC Comics avec un succès mitigé.

Depuis le héros revient ici et là en tant que faire valoir d'autres super-héros comme Wonder Woman par exemple. Un autre personnage est affublé du même nom et de la même difformité mais n'a évidemment rien à voir

Mais il est de revenir aux origines !

Garches, le 20 octobre 2022

l i s t e DES é p i s o d e s

Tous ces épisodes sont signés David Michelinie (scénario) et au dessin Ernie Chan (#7) puis Keith Giffen (#8-12)

7. The People of the Maelstrom
8. Master of the Seventh Void
9. Long Die N'hglthss!
10. The Eater of Souls!
11. Death at Darkmorn
12. The Slayer



CLAW THE UNCONQUERED

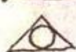
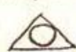
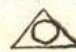
THE CHEERLESS MISTS HANG LOW OVER THE *LAKE OF HANDS* IN NORTHEASTERN *KARTH*, AS IF ATTEMPTING TO HIDE THE HIDEOUS *OBSCENITIES* THAT SNAKE FROM ITS ONCE-PLACID SURFACE...

...AS IF TRYING TO MASK THE SUDDEN *VIOLENCE* THAT CRACKS THE *TRANQUILITY* OF DAWN, THAT SHATTERS THE DELICATE *SILENCE* WITH VULGAR CRIES OF ALL-TOO-HUMAN *FEAR*...

BY THE GODS! THE SEAWEED--

--I-IT'S *ALIVE!*

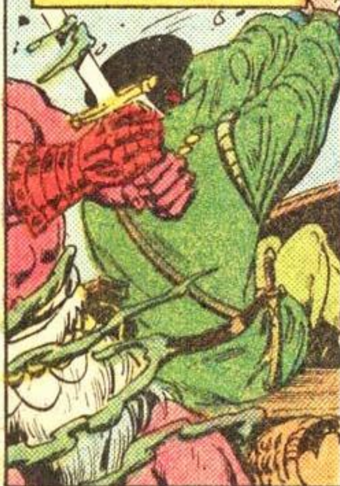
THE PEOPLE OF THE MAELSTROM

DAVID MICHELINIE
WRITER

ERNIE CHUA
ARTIST

JOE ORLANDO
EDITOR


CLAW THE UNCONQUERED, Vol. 2. No. 7. May-June, 1976. Published bi-monthly by NATIONAL PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS, INC., 75 Rockefeller Pláza, New York, N.Y. 10019. Carmine Infantino, Publisher. Joe Orlando, Editor. Paul Levitz, Assistant Editor. Sol Harrison, Vice President—Director of Operations. Bernard Kashdan, Vice President—Business Manager. Jack Adler, Production Manager. Advertising Representative, Sanford Schwarz & Co., Inc., 355 Lexington Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017, (212) 391-1400. Printed in U.S.A.

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IT HAS BEEN A LONG QUEST, THIS SEARCH FOR THE FORBIDDEN GRIMSTONE--


--AND THE TWO WARRIORS, CLAW OF PYTHARIA AND PRINCE GHILKYN OF THE THOUSAND HILLS, HAVE SEEN MUCH...


FOR THE SLIME-SLICK TENDRILS THAT COIL ABOUT THEM NOW ARE BUT THE LATEST OF THE HORRORS SENT TO BAR THEIR WAY...


THOUGH IF A CERTAIN FUR-CLAD BARBARIAN HAS ANY SAY ABOUT IT--THEY WILL ALSO BE--


--THE LAST!
P-TOK
CLAW! TH-THAT'S THE OIL FOR THE LAMPS! HOW WILL WE SEE OUR WAY THROUGH THE FOG?
I KNOW NOT, HILL-PRINCE!


BUT I DO KNOW THAT UNLESS WE CAN RID OURSELVES OF THESE WORRISOME WEEDS--


--WE SOON WON'T BE SEEING ANYTHING!


KA FWOOMPH!


IT'S AS I'D HOPED-- THE FLAMING OIL FLOATS ON THE WATER, FORMING A BARRIER BETWEEN US AND THOSE TWINING MONSTROSITIES.
AYE, FRIEND CLAW, BUT I'M AFRAID MONSTERS AREN'T THE ONLY MEAL THE FLAMES HUNGER FOR!


LOOK!
AND THUS SALVATION FROM ONE DOOM-- BECOMES THE INEVITABLE CAUSE OF ANOTHER...

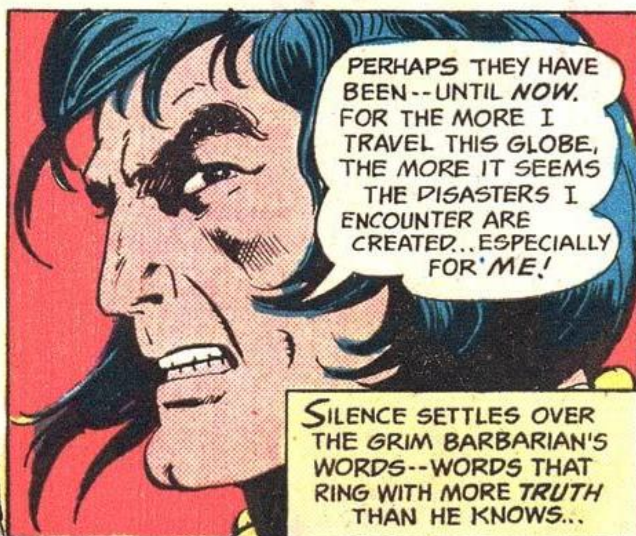

WHEN SUDDENLY...
HERE, MY FRIENDS, TAKE THESE OARS AND WE'LL PULL YOU ABOARD!
SORRY WE CAN'T GET ANY CLOSER-- THE FLAMES, YOU KNOW!

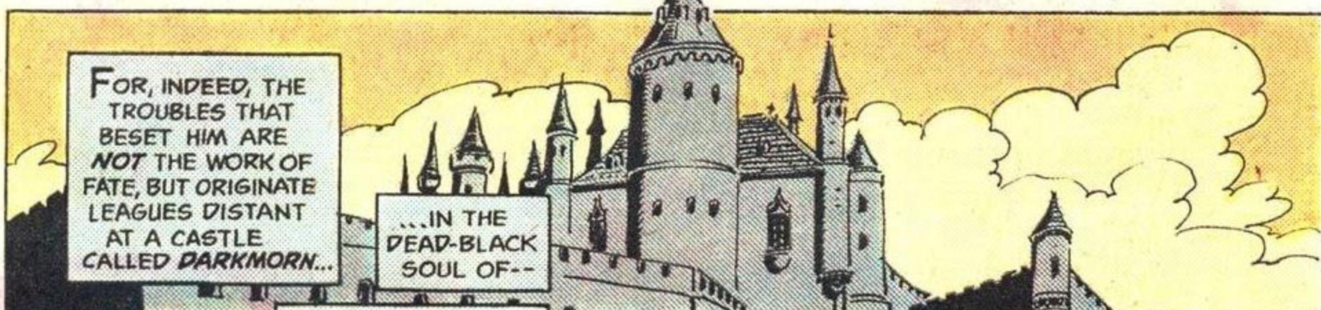

WELL, CLAW, DO WE TAKE THE CHANCE? THEY COULD BE MORE MONSTERS...
AYE, THAT THEY COULD. BUT AT THE MOMENT--


--I'M AFRAID WE'VE LITTLE CHOICE!













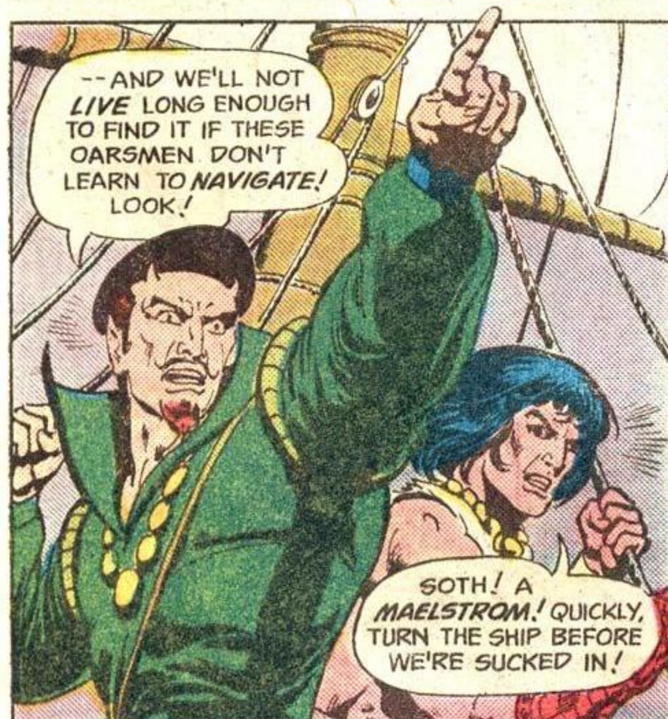
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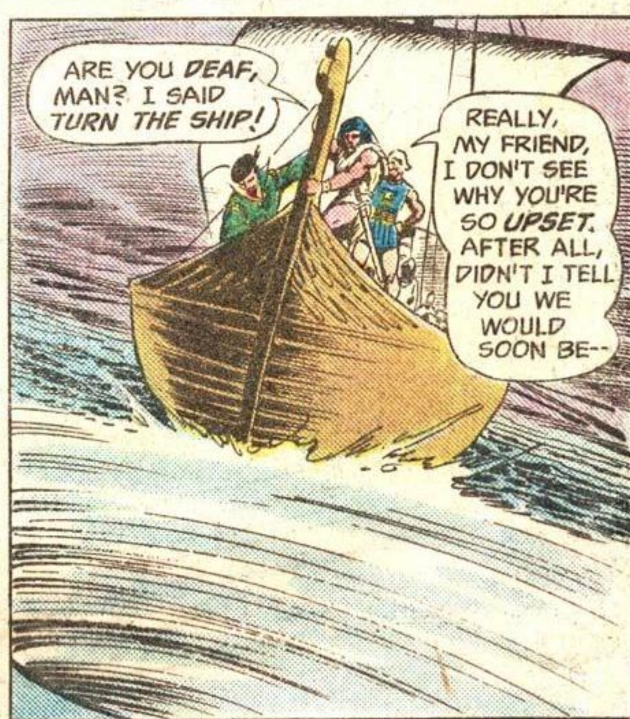

AYE, SORCERER, SHOULD HAVE--BUT DIDN'T! NEED I KEEP REMINDING YOU THAT IF THIS BARBARIAN SUCCEEDS IN BREECHING THE DIMENSIONAL BARRIERS--
--MY ULTIMATE RULE OF THE MULTIVERSE COULD WELL BE DOOMED?


YOUR JOB IS TO STOP HIM, MIFTUNG, AND IF YOU CAN'T DO THAT JOB--
B-BUT, SIRE, SOMETHING PROTECTS HIM! SOMETHING I DON'T UNDERSTAND--!


THEN TRY HARDER, WIZARD--OR YOU'LL SOON BE CONJURING STEW IN THE SCULLERY!
YES... SIRE...


BUT THE SOUNDS OF QUIET ANGER ARE LOST ON THE DISTANCE BETWEEN DARKMORN AND THE LAKE OF HANDS, WHERE...
WE'LL SOON BE HOME, GOOD SIRS, AND THEN YOU CAN TELL ME MORE OF THIS TALISMAN YOU SEEK.
AYE, TREFALION, FOR WE'VE BEEN TOLD IT LIES SOMEWHERE HEREABOUTS AND--


--AND WE'LL NOT LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO FIND IT IF THESE OARSMEN DON'T LEARN TO NAVIGATE! LOOK!
SOTH! A MAELSTROM! QUICKLY, TURN THE SHIP BEFORE WE'RE SUCKED IN!


ARE YOU DEAF, MAN? I SAID TURN THE SHIP!
REALLY, MY FRIEND, I DON'T SEE WHY YOU'RE SO UPSET. AFTER ALL, DIDN'T I TELL YOU WE WOULD SOON BE--

--HOME!
FOR A MOMENT, WONDER IS SUSPENDED-- AND THE FACT THAT THE FRAIL CRAFT GLIDES SOFTLY DOWN A GLASS-SMOOTH WALL THAT SHOULD BY ALL RIGHTS REND IT TO SPLINTERS GOES UNQUESTIONED..
FOR THE GEM-SPARKLED CITY THAT LIES AT THE WHIRLPOOL'S BASE PROVES A FAR MORE DEMANDING PUZZLE...
...THOUGH AN EQUALLY IMPOSSIBLE ONE...

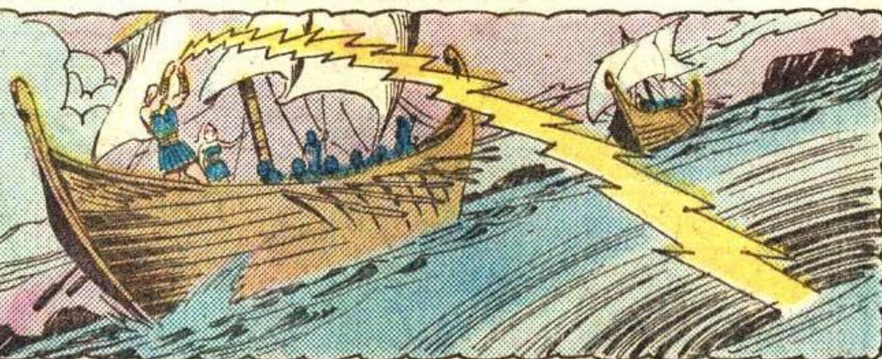

THE DOWNWARD JOURNEY IS MADE IN SILENCE, AND AS THE GLITTERING ENIGMA IS REACHED...
A VERY, UH, PLEASANT LITTLE TOWN.
THANK YOU. WE LIKE IT.
BUT WHAT MANNER OF BEINGS ARE YOU, THAT YOU CAN BEND NATURE TO YOUR VERY WILL?


WE ARE BUT HUMANS, LIKE YOURSELVES, ONLY-- WELL, COME, LET ME SHOW YOU OUR CITY. EXPLANATIONS CAN BE MADE ALONG THE WAY...


AND SO...
THE HESHAHNOY, MY FRIENDS, ARE A VERY ANCIENT RACE, HAVING AGES AGO REACHED A LEVEL OF CIVILIZATION UNDREAMED OF TODAY.


"AND, BEING A BENEVOLENT PEOPLE, WE ATTEMPTED TO SHARE OUR ADVANCEMENT WITH OTHERS...


"ONLY OUR CONTEMPORARIES WERE BARBARIC BY EVEN TODAY'S STANDARDS, AND REACTED TO OUR GIFTS WITH A FEAR BORN OF IGNORANCE...
"THEY ATTACKED OUR PEOPLE. AND SINCE THERE IS NOTHING A HESHAHNOY FINDS MORE LOATHSOME THAN AN ACT OF VIOLENCE, WE CHOSE NOT TO RETALIATE--
"--AND WE WERE SLAUGHTERED...
"THE FEW OF US THAT SURVIVED SOUGHT SAFETY IN THE MISTY CONFINES OF THIS LAKE...







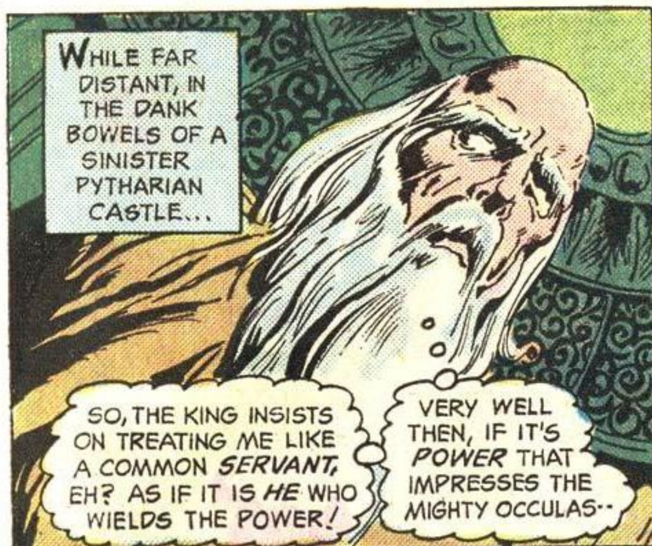








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WHILE FAR DISTANT, IN THE DANK BOWELS OF A SINISTER PYTHARIAN CASTLE...
SO, THE KING INSISTS ON TREATING ME LIKE A COMMON SERVANT, EH? AS IF IT IS HE WHO WIELDS THE POWER!
VERY WELL THEN, IF IT'S POWER THAT IMPRESSES THE MIGHTY OCCULAS--

--THEN I'LL JUST SHOW HIM WHAT POWER CAN DO!
DARK WORDS ARE SPOKEN...

...AND LEAGUES TO THE SOUTH, THE MUD AND AGE-LESS SLIME THAT BLANKETS THE FLOOR OF THE LAKE OF HANDS BEGINS TO STIR--

--FORM--


--AND RISE!

BUT THE GEM--WE MUST HAVE IT!
I'M SORRY, THAT'S QUITE IMPOSSIBLE.

WE UNDERSTAND YOUR POSITION, TREFALION, AND WE RESPECT IT. BUT PERHAPS, IF YOU UNDERSTOOD OURS...

FOR YOU SEE, MERE DAYS AGO A **DEMON** WAS UNLEASHED UPON THE WORLD! A FIEND CALLED **N'HGLTHSS** WHOSE FAINTEST **TOUCH** BRINGS HORRIBLE DEATH!

AYE, AND WE SOON LEARNED THAT THE ONLY WEAPON THAT COULD **STOP** N'HGLTHSS WAS **MOONTHORN**, A SILVERN SWORD LINKED TO MY **SHADOWED PAST**--

--AND SECRETED IN A **NETHER DIMENSION**...

THE ONLY WAY TO **REACH** THAT DIMENSION IS BY COMBINING THE THREE FACETS OF THE ARCANE **GRIMSTONE**. WE'VE FOUGHT DEADLY PERILS TO OBTAIN **TWO** FACETS, BUT THEY'RE **USELESS** WITHOUT **YOURS**...

AND RECENT OCCURRENCES HAVE LED US TO BELIEVE THAT N'HGLTHSS WAS SUMMONED TO DESTROY **ME**, AND WILL NOT CEASE HIS RAMPAGE UNTIL HE **SUCCEEDS**--

--EVEN IF HE MUST DESTROY A **WORLD** IN THE PROCESS!






LITTLE LIGHT SPILLS DOWN THROUGH THE SURFACE OF THE LAKE OF HANDS--BUT THAT MATTERS NAUGHT TO THE SLIME-STREWN CARICATURE THAT LUMBERS ALONG ITS SHADOW-DARK FLOOR--


--FOR THE CREATURE'S GOAL SHINES THROUGH THE SHIFTING MURK LIKE A DEADLY BEACON...


WELL, FRIEND CLAW, 'TWOULD SEEM WE'LL HAVE TO FIND SOME OTHER WAY TO DEFEAT THAT--


EH? CLAW!


NO, CLAW! WAIT! IF YOU REMOVE THE STONE NOW, THE HESHAHNOY WILL DIE! YOU CAN'T--


HOLD YOUR TONGUE, HILL-MAN, AND TELL ME NOT WHAT I CAN AND CANNOT DO! YOU SEEK TO SAVE A WORLD--
--BUT I SEEK SOMETHING FAR DEARER!

















CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING.


THINK, CLAW! IS THIS WHAT YOU WOULD DESTROY?
IS THIS INNOCENCE TO BE THE PRICE PAID FOR ONE MAN'S OBSESSION?
BUT I... I...






NO... I SUPPOSE NOT...
THE TEMPORARY MADNESS OF DESPAIR SOFTENS, AND THE SCENE QUIETS ONCE MORE...

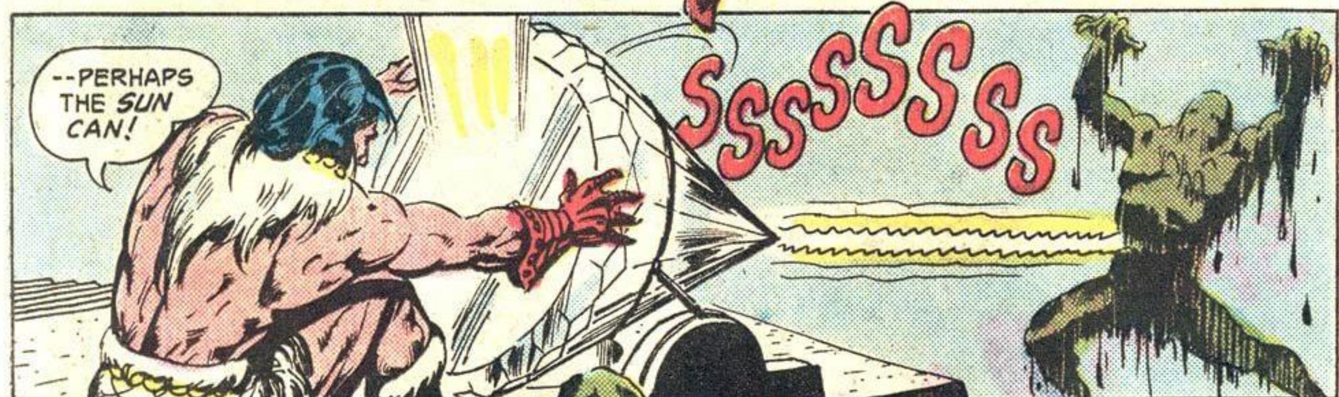

...BUT IT IS A CALM THAT WILL SOON BE SHATTERED BY A MOST UNEXPECTED--
--INTRUDER!
SPRAKASH


EEEEEE

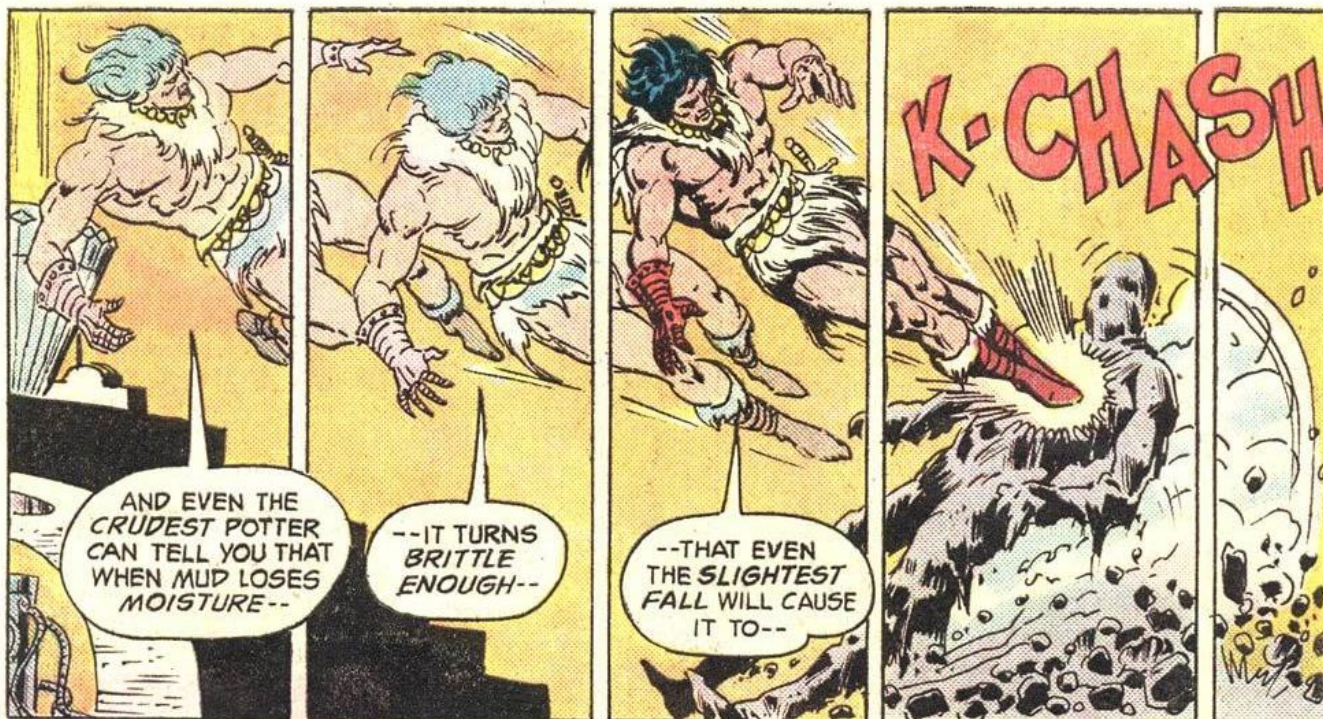
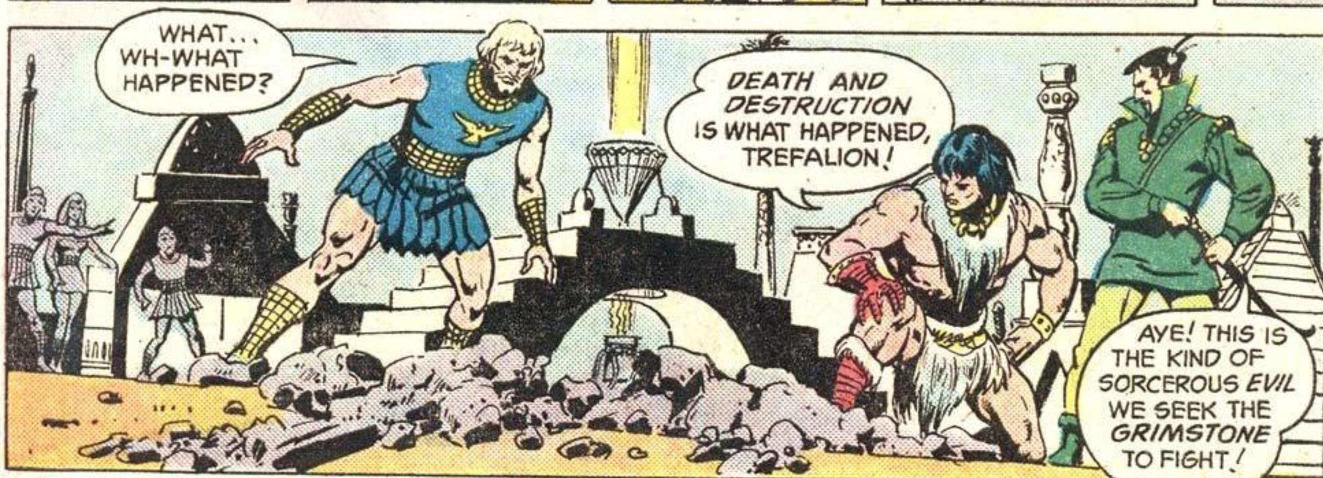

HO, CLAW! 'TWOULD SEEM YOUR ENEMIES STILL SEEK YOU OUT!
THEN BY ALL MEANS, HILL-PRINCE, LET US SHOW THESE UNSEEN FOES--

--THAT THEY'VE FOUND ME!
LIKE A PEAL OF UNHOLY THUNDER, THE UNFAMILIAR SOUNDS OF MORTAL COMBAT RING OUT ACROSS THE PEACEFUL CITY OF THE HESHAHNOY...

BUT A DOZEN WELL-PLACED BLOWS CAN YIELD BUT A SINGLE CONCLUSION...
BY SAPETH'S PRONG! IT'S LIKE FIGHTING MUD!
AYE, METHINKS A DIFFERENT TACT IS CALLED FOR!

Y-YOU MEAN-- RUNNING?!
FIE! YOU KNOW ME BETTER THAN THAT! I MERELY MEAN THAT IF STEEL CAN'T WIN OUR BATTLE FOR US--

--PERHAPS THE SUN CAN!
SSSSSSSS

BUT, CLAW-- MUD DOESN'T BURN!
PERHAPS NOT, BUT IT DOES DRY OUT!


AND EVEN THE CRUDEST POTTER CAN TELL YOU THAT WHEN MUD LOSES MOISTURE--
--IT TURNS BRITTLE ENOUGH--
--THAT EVEN THE SLIGHTEST FALL WILL CAUSE IT TO--
K-CHASH

WHAT... WH-WHAT HAPPENED?
DEATH AND DESTRUCTION IS WHAT HAPPENED, TREFALION!
AYE! THIS IS THE KIND OF SORCEROUS EVIL WE SEEK THE GRIMSTONE TO FIGHT!

CAN YOU SEE WHY WE WANT YOUR PRECIOUS GEM NOW? WILL YOU NOT RECONSIDER YOUR POSITION?
I... ALREADY HAVE RECONSIDERED IT, MY FRIEND. AND I HAVE MADE MY DECISION.

I MUST ASK YOU TO LEAVE OUR CITY! AFTER I HAVE ASSURED MYSELF THAT THE PEOPLE CONCUR WITH MY JUDGEMENT--
--I WILL ACCOMPANY YOU TO THE SURFACE!

WITHIN MOMENTS, THE HIGH HESHAHNOY RETURNS--AND THE JOURNEY UP THE TOWERING WALL OF WATER BEGINS...

ONLY THIS TIME THE SIDES *TREMBLE*, CHURNING AS IF *ANGERED* AT THE UNNATURAL PASSAGE...

AND SOON, ON THE SURFACE...

THE MAELSTROM *ROILS*, TREFALION. PERHAPS YOUR *MACHINES*--

NO, PYTHARIAN, 'TIS MERELY THE RESULTS OF THIS *PARTING GIFT* I BRING YOU...

WHA--THE *GRIMSTONE FACET!*

THE SAME. FOR YOU SEE, THE ATTACK IN THE PLAZA CONVINCED US ALL THAT *YOUR* NEED IS FAR GREATER THAN *OURS!*

BUT, WHAT OF YOUR *PEOPLE?*

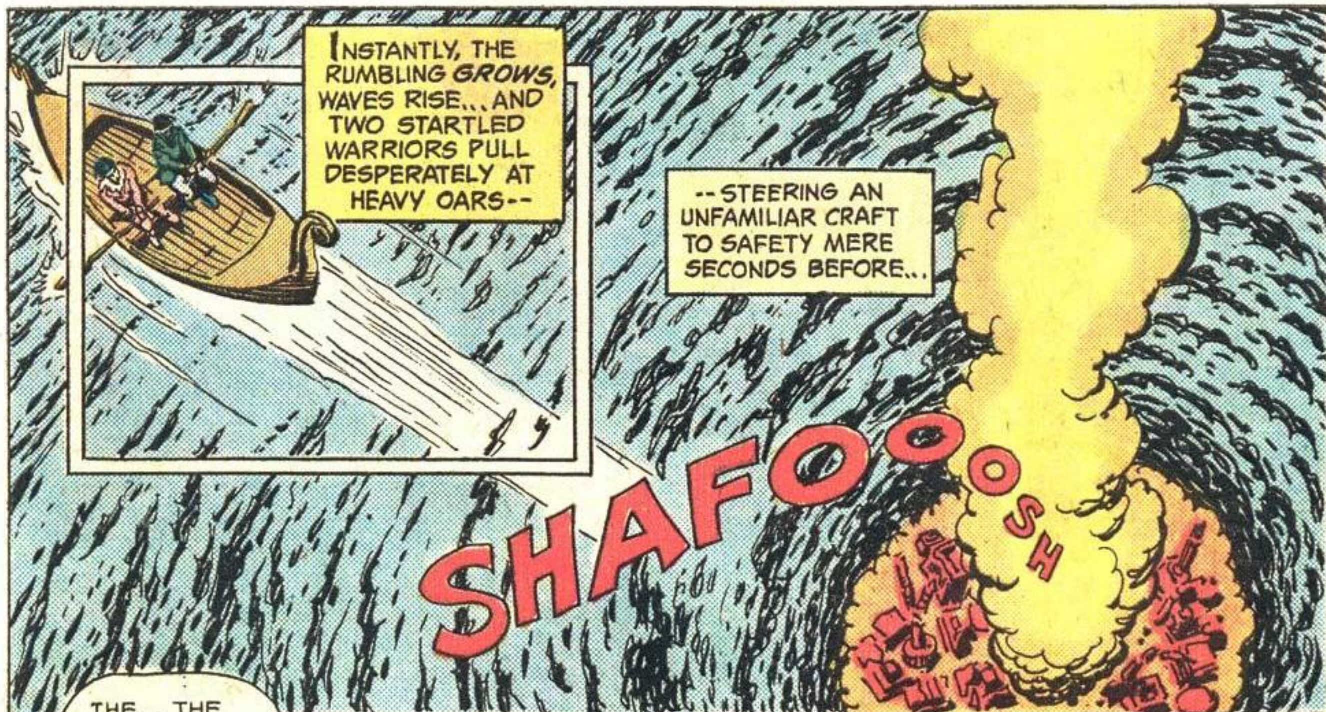
ALAS, MY FRIENDS, IF NOTHING *ELSE*, YOUR VISIT HAS SHOWN US THAT *VIOLENCE* IS AN *INESCAPABLE* PART OF THIS WORLD, THAT IT WILL SEEK US OUT WHEREVER WE MAY BE.

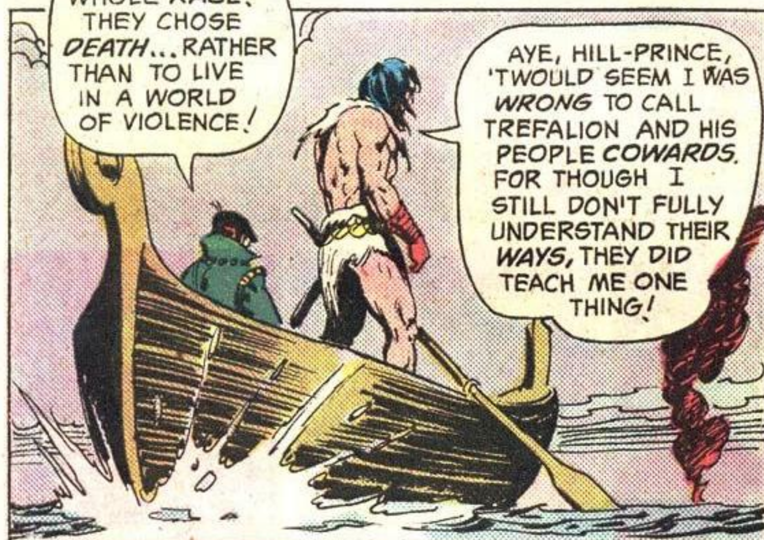
I'M AFRAID THERE IS *NO PLACE* FOR THE HESHAHNOY HERE...

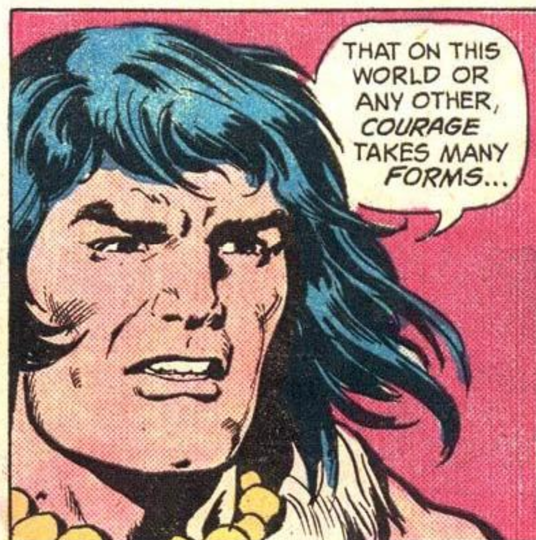
BUT PERHAPS, WITH THE AID OF THIS STONE, YOU CAN MAKE THE WORLD INTO A PLACE WHERE EVEN *WARRIORS* MIGHT ONE DAY LIVE IN HARMONY...

PERHAPS...

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INSTANTLY, THE RUMBLING GROWS, WAVES RISE... AND TWO STARTLED WARRIORS PULL DESPERATELY AT HEAVY OARS--
--STEERING AN UNFAMILIAR CRAFT TO SAFETY MERE SECONDS BEFORE..
SHAFOOOOSH

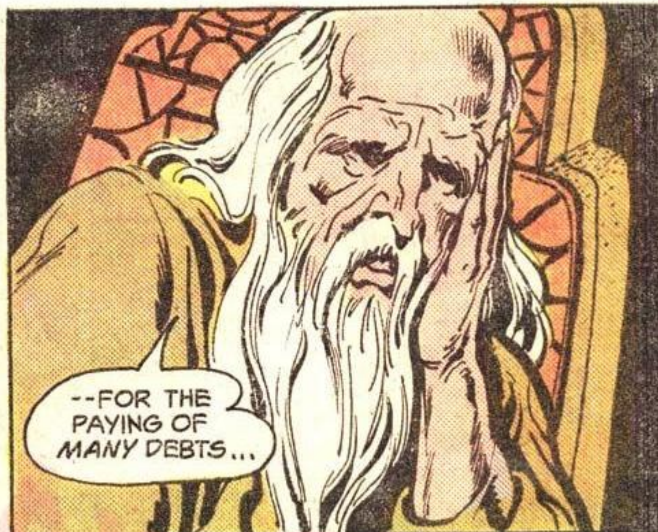

THE...THE WHOLE RACE! THEY CHOSE DEATH... RATHER THAN TO LIVE IN A WORLD OF VIOLENCE!
AYE, HILL-PRINCE, 'TWOULD SEEM I WAS WRONG TO CALL TREFALION AND HIS PEOPLE COWARDS. FOR THOUGH I STILL DON'T FULLY UNDERSTAND THEIR WAYS, THEY DID TEACH ME ONE THING!


THAT ON THIS WORLD OR ANY OTHER, COURAGE TAKES MANY FORMS...

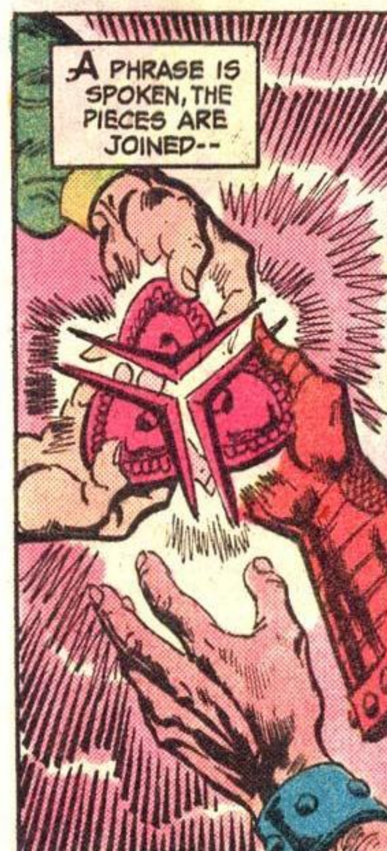

BUT ANGER, OUTLANDER, HAS ITS DIFFERENT FACES AS WELL...
YOU FOOL! YOU BLUNDERING, INCOMPETENT DOLT! NOW THAT ACCURSED SAVAGE HAS THE COMPLETED GRIMSTONE!
B-BUT, SIRE, I-I TOLD YOU! HE'S PROTECTED!


THWACK
DAMN HIS PROTECTION! AND DAMN YOUR EXCUSES AS WELL!

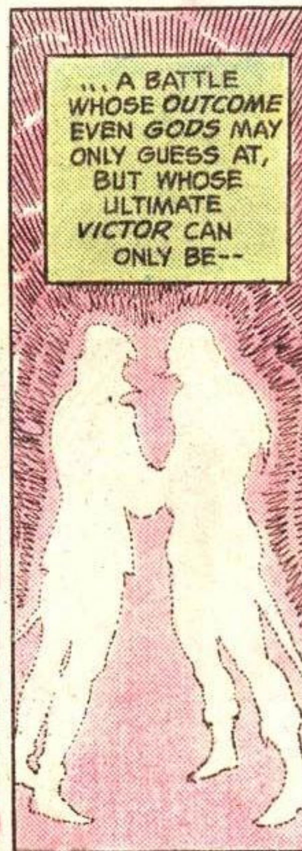














NEXT ISSUE: JOURNEY TO THE SEVENTH VOID
ON SALE DURING THE THIRD WEEK IN APRIL

CLAW THE UNCONQUERED

PICTURE A WORLD WITHOUT RULES, WITHOUT REASON. A WORLD WHERE EVEN THE SIMPLEST LAWS OF NATURE LIE GIBBERING UNHEEDED IN FORGOTTEN CORNERS. A WORLD WHERE SANITY IS A GOSSAMER THING, EASILY TORN...

THIS, THEN, IS THE REALM OF CHAOS...

BUT FOR A GRIM-VISAGED BARBARIAN AND HIS GREEN-CLAD COMPANION, IT IS ALSO THE END OF A COSMOS-SPANNING QUEST--

--AN ARDUOUS SEARCH WHOSE OUTCOME MAY SOON COST THEM MORE THAN THE MERE LIVES THEY HAVE TO OFFER...

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'TWOULD SEEM, HILL-PRINCE, THE GRIMSTONE DID ITS WORK WELL!
AYE, FRIEND CLAW, THERE'S LITTLE DOUBT WE'VE SUCCEEDED IN ENTERING SOME ALIEN DIMENSION.
I JUST HOPE WE'VE AS MUCH LUCK FINDING OUR WAY--

--BACK? C-CLAW! I...I...

IIIEEEE
WHA-- GHILKYN!

BY THE GODS! WHAT MANNER OF MADNESS IS THIS?!

UNCERTAIN, THE WILD-EYED WARRIOR THRUSTS HIS HAND FORWARD, GRABS EMPTINESS-- AND FINDS TO HIS GROWING DISMAY THAT THIS PARTICULAR EMPTINESS--

--GRABS BACK!

SOTH!

IMAGINE NIGHTMARE: GIVE IT YELLOW BREATH, CACKLING VOICE, CLUTCHING HANDS-- AND YOU'LL KNOW A VISION TO FREEZE THE SOUL OF A CIVILIZED MAN...

BUT FORTUNATELY, CLAW HAS NO SUCH HINDERING CIVILIZATION-- HE HAS ONLY INSTINCT AND PYTHARIAN STEEL...


...AND THE DESPERATE DETERMINATION THAT EVEN HERE, IN A WORLD WHERE REALITY HOLDS LITTLE SWAY--

--HE WILL SURVIVE!

MASTER OF THE SEVENTH VOID

AN ADVENTURE in HEROIC FANTASY
BY DAVID MICHELINIE- WRITER
KEITH GIFFIN, RICARDO VILLAGRAN
and OSCAR NOVELLE- ARTISTS
LIZ BERUBE-COLORIST
JOE ORLANDO - EDITOR















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--BEGINNINGS: THE SEARCH FOR SHADOWED ORIGINS AMID A PAST AS BLANK AND FEATURELESS AS A RIVER STONE. A QUEST WHOSE OBJECTIVE REMAINS TANGLED IN MYSTERY, TO BE REVEALED ONLY AT THE SLAYING OF THE RAMPAGING DEATH-DEMON, N'HGLTHSS...

AND THUS HAD THE PERIL-FRAUGHT JOURNEY LED HERE, TO THIS COLD AND FRIGHTFUL NETHER WORLD, FOR HIDDEN SOMEWHERE WITHIN THESE CHAOS-TAINTED BORDERS LIES MOONTHORN, THE SILVER SWORD THAT IS THE ONLY WEAPON EFFECTIVE AGAINST N'HGLTHSS...

AND IT IS THAT BLADE CLAW HAS SWORN TO RETRIEVE--

--OR ELSE *DIE* IN THE TRYING!
UNGH!
AND SO THE CONFLICT PROCEEDS--
--TO ITS INEVITABLE--
--CONCLUSION!
KWAM
SHRAKT
--*THIS* PARTICULAR BIT OF SUSTENANCE--
--CAN BE MORE *TROUBLE*--
--THAN IT'S *WORTH*!
FOR A MOMENT, THE SKY-ROCK HUMS CONTENTEDLY AT THE PROSPECT OF *DIGESTING* ITS LATEST CONQUEST...
KRAK
BRAMM
SPTOOCH!
BUT THAT CONTENTMENT IS *SHORT-LIVED*...
FOR IT SOON BECOMES OBVIOUS THAT EVEN WHEN TRAPPED IN A STONY GULLET--
MAYBE *NEXT* TIME THAT CURSED BEAST WILL *THINK* BEFORE IT BITES OFF MORE THAN...IT...CAN...
WORDS FADE...

AS SLOWLY, IN AN AWED SILENCE RIPPLED ONLY BY THE WHISPER OF COSMIC WINDS, CLAW RISES... AND FOR THE FIRST TIME GAZES UNHINDERED AT THE ALIEN WORLD AROUND HIM...

...A WORLD OF CONTRADICTIONS AND IMPOSSIBILITIES, ALL DOMINATED BY A TOWERING OBSIDIAN SPIRE... AND AN UNNATURAL ***GATEWAY*** OF PALLID, UNWHOLESOME LIGHT...

THAT ***GATE*** IS THE FIRST ***HUMAN*** ASPECT I'VE SEEN ON THIS PLANE. IF THERE ARE ***ANSWERS*** TO BE FOUND--

--IT'S LIKELY ***THERE*** I'LL FIND THEM!

LEAVES RUSTLE, AND THE ***FOREST*** SIGHS, THOUGH NO ***BREEZE*** STIRS THE BRANCHES...

ALMOST AS IF THE VERY TREES THEMSELVES AWAIT THE APPROACH OF THE DARK-SCOWLED INTRUDER...

WHICH, INDEED--


--THEY DO!
TAKE HEED, CLAW OF PYTHARIA! BEGONE WHILE YOU STILL HAVE YOUR LIFE!
WHA-? THAT TREE--!


AYE, BARBARIAN, THE TREES, THE ROCKS, THE VERY AIR--ALL HERE ARE SUBJECT TO THE WILL OF MAHAN K'HANDA!


AND THROUGH THEM I CAUTION YOU! THE HILL-PRINCE WAS REJECTED FROM THIS REALM BECAUSE HE WAS HUMAN--


--BUT YOUR FATE, SHOULD YOU REMAIN, SHALL PROVE FAR WORSE!


THE CHOICE IS A SIMPLE ONE...


...FOR I'M SURE THAT EVEN YOU CAN SEE THE WISDOM OF MY--


THRAK


VERY WELL, WARRIOR. YOU'VE BEEN WARNED...


THE STONE IS SPONGY, YIELDING, AS IF UNCERTAIN THAT IT IS STONE...


BUT STILL, THE UPWARD JOURNEY IS MADE...
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PAGE FOLLOWING







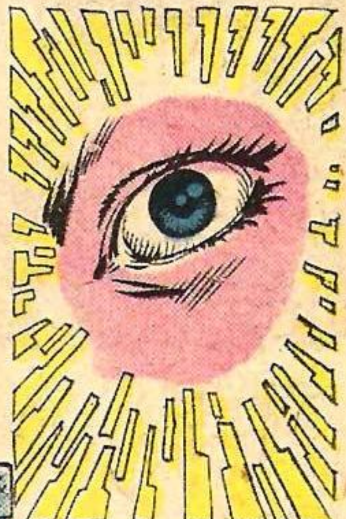
--THE *INCREDIBLE!*

A SCENE OF UNMATCHED SPLENDOR WHERE BY ALL LOGIC THERE SHOULD BE ONLY EMPTINESS. AND IN THE CENTER OF THAT ENIGMA, CAUGHT IN A HAND OF SCULPTED BRONZE, THE GLIMMERING SILVER METAL BLADE THAT CAN ONLY BE...







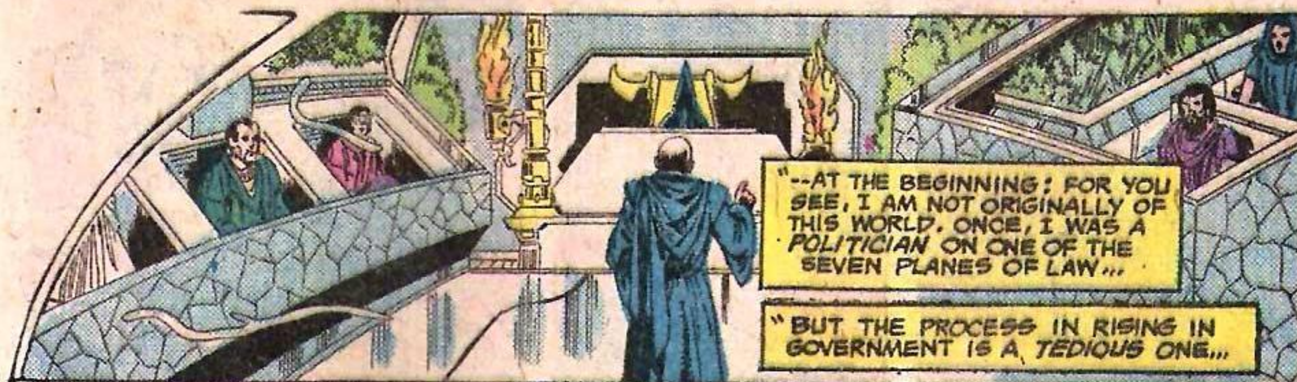


...WHAT!
AS YOU'VE NO DOUBT SURMISED, I AM... MAHAN K'HANDA!
AND THIS REALM AND ALL WITHIN ITS BORDERS-- INCLUDING YOURSELF--
--BELONG TO ME!
I BELONG TO NO ONE, DEMON!
AS I'LL GLADLY PROVE ONCE I'VE GOT WHAT I CAME FO--
ZZZZHHAK
FORGIVE ME, PYTHARIAN, I NEGLECTED TO MENTION THE SPELL OF PROTECTION I'VE CAST ABOUT MOON-THORN. IT IS IMPENETRABLE-- AND SHALL ENDURE UNTIL THE EVENT OF MY... UNLIKELY DEMISE!
IN THAT CASE, WIZARD, ALLOW ME TO HASTEN ALONG THAT "UNLIKELY" CIRCUMSTANCE!

CONTINUED ON 5TH PAGE FOLLOWING.

THAT WAS FOOLISH, MORTAL, VERY FOOLISH, BUT THEN, PERHAPS YOU DON'T YET COMPREHEND THE *FORCES* YOU VIE AGAINST!

NOT THAT I CAN *FAULT* YOU YOUR IGNORANCE. I, MYSELF, UNDERSTOOD LITTLE OF THE CONSEQUENCES INVOLVED--



"...AND AT LENGTH I GREW *IMPATIENT* FOR A GREATER TASTE OF--

"--*POWER*!

"AND SO I SOUGHT ANCIENT SCROLLS, KNOWLEDGE THAT WAS OLD WHEN THE WORLD WAS YOUNG...

"...I LEARNED *CONJURING*...

"...THOUGH NOT, APPARENTLY, *CAUTION*. FOR A *MISCAST SPELL* SENT ME TUMBLING INTO THIS VOID--

"--WHERE, BEFORE I COULD *RECTIFY* MY ERROR, THE CAUSTIC ELEMENTS HERE BEGAN TO *FEED*--

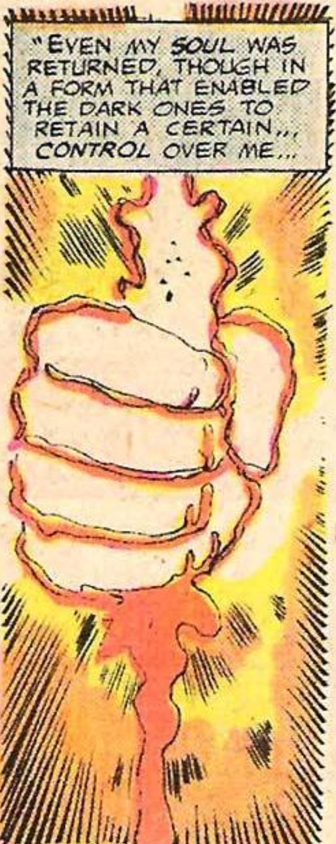
"--ON MY LIVING, IMMORTAL *SOUL*!

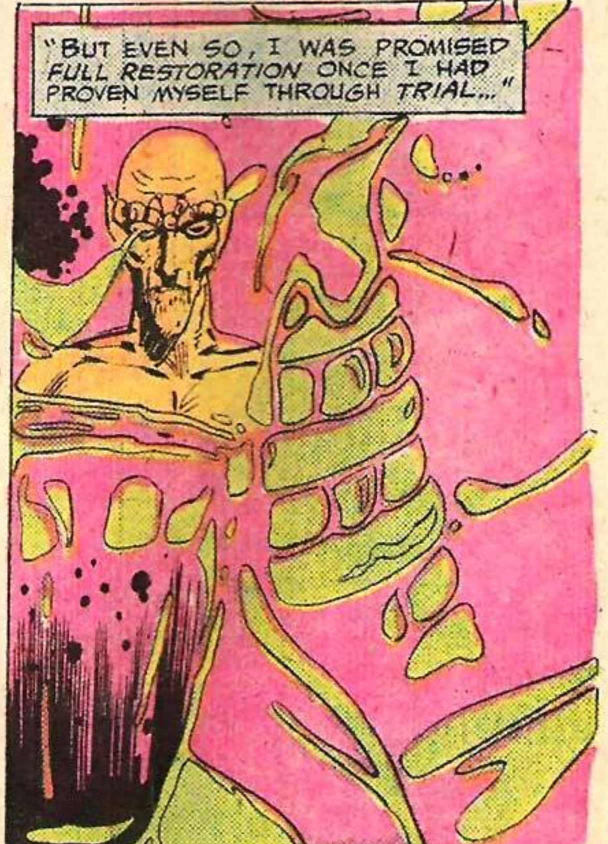

"THE ORDEAL LEFT ME... CHANGED... BUT UNDAUNTED...


"I BEGAN PLEADING TO THE DARK ONES, SWEARING OBEDIENCE, SERVITUDE, REVERENCE, AND AT LAST... I WAS HEARD!


"FOR THERE APPEARED BEFORE ME ONE OF THE MASTERS! A SHADOW-GOD WHO HAD SAMPLED MY SOUL--AND HAD BEEN IMPRESSED BY THE CORRUPTION HE FOUND THERE...


"AND THUS A FURTHER METAMORPHOSIS WAS INITIATED. ONE THAT GAVE ME THIS INVULNERABLE BODY--AS WELL AS THE POWER I HAD SO AVIDLY CRAVED...


"EVEN MY SOUL WAS RETURNED, THOUGH IN A FORM THAT ENABLED THE DARK ONES TO RETAIN A CERTAIN... CONTROL OVER ME...


"BUT EVEN SO, I WAS PROMISED FULL RESTORATION ONCE I HAD PROVEN MYSELF THROUGH TRIAL..."



THAT TRIAL, BARBARIAN, IS THE PROTECTION OF MOONTHORN.
AND I'M SURE YOU'LL UNDERSTAND THAT WITH MY SOUL IN THE BALANCE, SUCH PROTECTION IS ONE TASK--


--I INTEND TO CARRY OUT!
A ONCE-HUMAN HAND RISES, A SPARKLING SCEPTRE SHRIEKS --


--AND THE THICK, HUMID AIR SPLITS LIKE AN OPEN WOUND, SPEWING FORTH A HORDE WHOSE VERY EXISTENCE DEFIES REALITY...


UNMOVING, CLAW BRACES FOR THE ONSLAUGHT, CONSIDERING HIS ATTACKERS...
HIS EYES TELL HIM THEY HAVE FORM...


SWATCH
...A QUICK SLASH OF HIS CRYSTAL STAFF ASSURES THAT THEY HAVE SUBSTANCE...


...AND THE AWESOME STRENGTH OF HIS SUN-BRONZED ARM WILL SOON SHOW--
--IF THEY CAN DIE!


ABRUPTLY, A SAVAGE HOWL BURSTS FROM CLAW'S THROAT, AS THE LAST VESTIGE OF REASON FADES--


--LEAVING ONLY INSTINCT--
SPKASH


--AND A GRIM DESIRE TO SELL LIFE--


RRYYAAA
--AT AS DEAR A COST AS POSSIBLE...


ALL THE WHILE KNOWING THAT THE OUTCOME OF THAT DESPERATE BARGAINING--


--REMAINS SOLEMNLY--
--INEVITABLY--


--THE SAME!


AND NEARBY, A PAIR OF PULPY LIPS TWISTS INTO THE SEMBLANCE OF A SATISFIED SMILE...
UNTIL SUDDENLY--


--SOMETHING RATHER--


--SURPRISING OCCURS--


--AS WITH AN EXPRESSION OF BOTH CONFUSION AND ALMOST BESTIAL FURY--
--CLAW BREAKS FREE!

AND WITH ONE MIGHTY ARC OF WEIGHTED STEEL, THE VICTORY IS HIS!

WHRASH

HO, WIZARD! IT SEEMS THIS DRAGON-PAW SERVES AS MY GUARDIAN EVEN HERE! AND NOW THAT IT'S HELPED ME DISPOSE OF YOUR MINIONS, I'LL--

YOU'LL WHAT, BARBARIAN? OR HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN --THAT MY BODY IS INVULNERABLE?

I...I...

YES, OUTLANDER. YOU WERE SAYING...?

FOR THE SPACE OF A HEARTBEAT, THE AIR FAIRLY CRACKLES WITH FRUSTRATION AND IMPOTENT RAGE... AND THEN...

WHA...?

NO! TH-THE JEWEL! S-S-STOP!

I--I CAN'T!

THE HAND ACTS... OF ITS OWN ACCORD!

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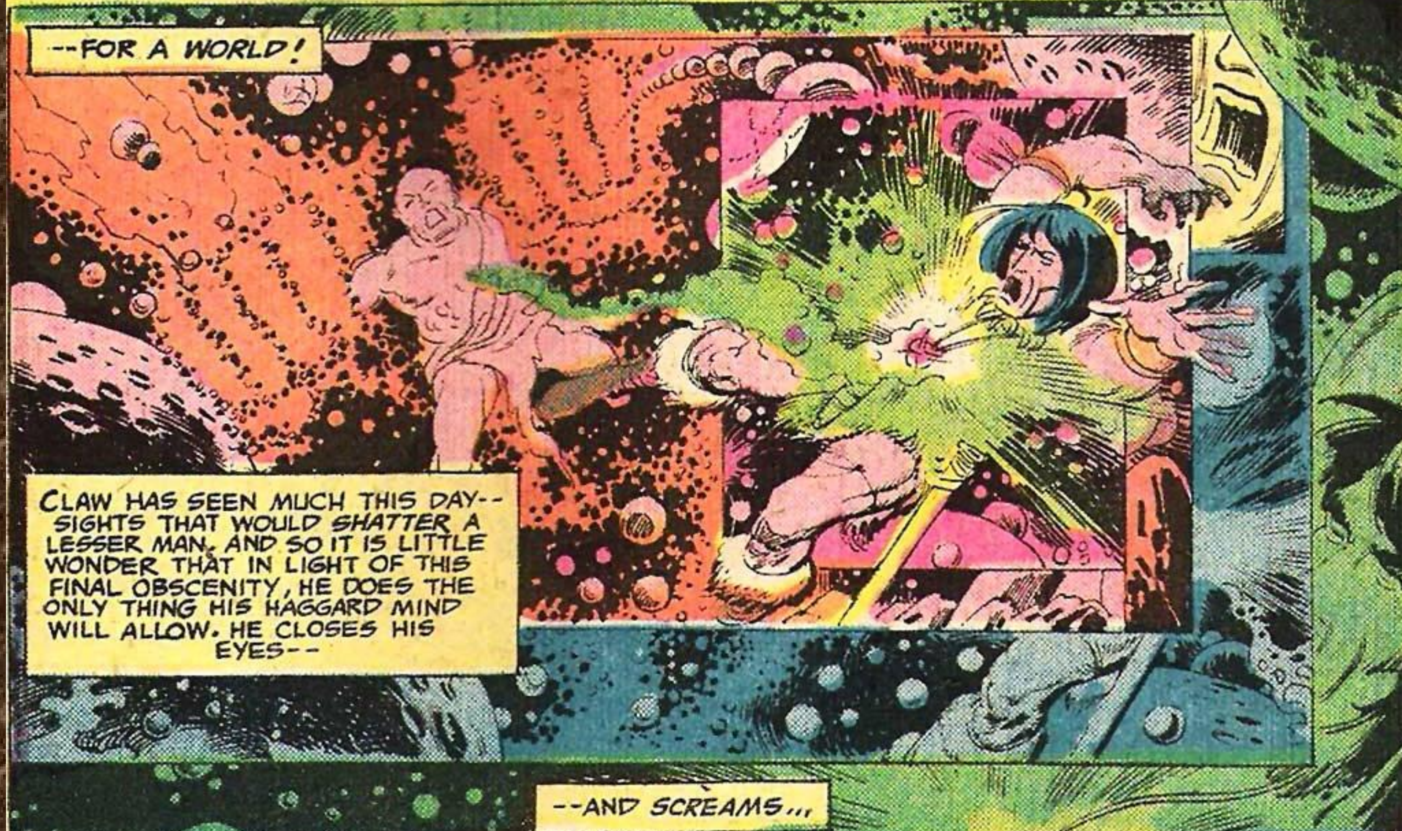

KRRRENKLE
I CAN'T CONTROL IT!

B-BUT YOU MUST! PLEASE! T-TAKE THE SILVER SWORD! TAKE ANYTHING! JUST GIVE ME BACK MY--


SPLAKALAKT
--SOOOOOO...


GODS! THEN THAT'S THE HOLD THE DARK ONES KEPT! THEY RETURNED MAHAN'S SOUL-- BUT LOCKED IN A CASING OF FRAGILE GLASS!
ONLY HOW COULD MY HAND KNOW THAT? HOW--?


BUT THE TIME FOR QUESTIONS IS OVER...
...EVEN AS TIME ENDS AS WELL--


--FOR A WORLD!
CLAW HAS SEEN MUCH THIS DAY-- SIGHTS THAT WOULD SHATTER A LESSER MAN. AND SO IT IS LITTLE WONDER THAT IN LIGHT OF THIS FINAL OBSCENITY, HE DOES THE ONLY THING HIS HAGGARD MIND WILL ALLOW. HE CLOSES HIS EYES--
--AND SCREAMS...


DIES...AND AT LAST...
CONGRATULATIONS, LORD CLAW. THE CONTEST IS YOURS--AS IS THE PRIZE!
WH... WHO...?


IN MANY FORMS, AND BY MANY NAMES. ON THIS PARTICULAR PLANE, I AM REFERRED TO AS--THE SHADOW-GOD!
ONE OF MY SUBJECTS--THAT BUFFOON, K'HANDA--WAS CHARGED WITH SLAYING YOU, BUT, ALAS--


--GOOD SERVANTS ARE HARD TO FIND!


NO MATTER, THOUGH. OUR FATES REMAIN INTERTWINED--AND WE SHALL MEET AGAIN. THOUGH I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU'D CARE TO YIELD NOW?
AFTER ALL, IT WOULD SAVE A GREAT DEAL OF UNNECESSARY--


SHWAK
UNF!
NO WORDS ARE NEEDED--FOR THE ANSWER HAS BEEN GIVEN...


AND AS THE PORTAL BETWEEN DIMENSIONS OPENS ONE LAST TIME, A PAIR OF COLD, INHUMAN EYES WATCHES--AND GLOWERS--
--AND PLANS...
NEXT ISSUE: CLAW'S ORIGIN--REVEALED! IN... LONG DIE N'HGLTHSS!
(ON SALE THE SECOND WEEK IN JUNE!)

REJECTION FROM AN ALIEN DIMENSION CAN BE A *DISCONCERTING* EXPERIENCE. JUST ASK *PRINCE GHILKYN* OF THE THOUSAND HILLS. IN FACT, HE'D PROBABLY AGREE THAT THE ONLY THING *WORSE* IS REAPPEARING IN A *FAMILIAR* DIMENSION--

--AND BEING IMMEDIATELY SET UPON BY A BAND OF SCALE-ENCRUSTED *MONSTROSITIES*--SLIME-SLAVERING FURIES WHOSE EYES SHINE NOT WITH EVIL, BUT MERELY--

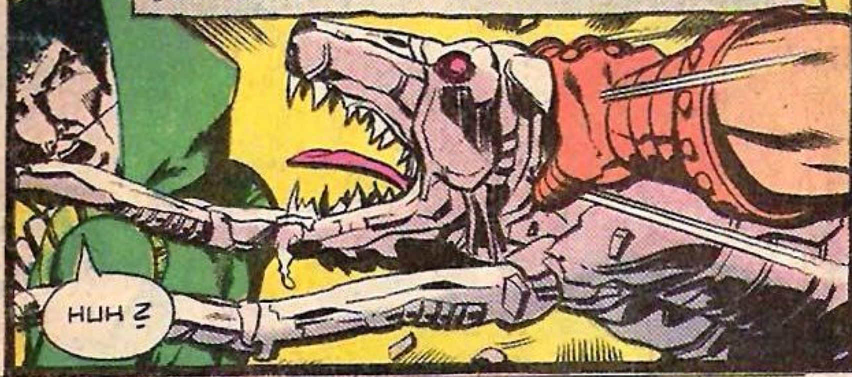


--HUNGER...

THEN, YOU FOUL-SMELLING CURS, SEE HOW THE TASTE OF *STEEL* TINGLES YOUR PALATE!

FOR THIS UNWILLING *"MEAL"* YOU ATTACK WAS BORN A *PRINCE*--





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--SALVATION: A STEELY-EYED BARBARIAN NAMED CLAW, LATE OF THE PYTHARIAN OUTLANDS, WHO FOR THESE LAST WEEKS HAS TRAIPSED A CONTINENT AND A COSMOS ON A DARK AND TORTUROUS QUEST,,, A JOURNEY WHOSE HARDSHIPS AND HORRORS CLING TO THE SPIRIT LIKE A LIVING LEECH EVEN AFTER THE TROUBLESOME TASK IS DONE...

SKRRAT

AND THUS CAN THE DARK-MANED WARRIOR BE FORGIVEN IF HIS SUDDEN APPEARANCE IS SOMEWHAT LACKING IN --

--GENTILITY...

LONG DIE N'HGLTHSS!

AN ADVENTURE IN HEROIC FANTASY BY:
DAVID MICHELINIE (WRITER) • KEITH GIFFEN and BOB LAYTON (ARTISTS) • JOE ORLANDO (EDITOR)
LIZ BERUBE (COLORIST) * MILT SNAPPIN (LETTERER)

THE BATTLE CONTINUES, WITH PRINCE GHILKYN SILENTLY ACCEPTING THE FACT THAT HIS FRIEND IS ONCE MORE AT HIS SIDE...

...AND CLAW HAPPY TO BE THERE, REMEMBERING ONLY HOURS BEFORE WHEN HE HAD WATCHED THE GREEN-CLAD SWORDSMAN *EJECTED* FROM THE CHAOS-REALM THEY HAD BOTH GAINED THROUGH THE ARCANE TALISMAN, THE *GRIMSTONE*...

LATER, TRAVERSING THAT DEMONIC PLANE ALONE, CLAW HAD COME UPON THE *OBJECT* OF HIS WORLDS-SPANNING SEARCH --

--THE ENCHANTED, SILVER-HUED BLADE CALLED *MOONTHORN*...

BUT MOONTHORN HAD A *GUARDIAN* -- THE MALEVOLENT POLITICIAN-CUM-SORCERER, *MAHAN K'HANDA*... A CREATURE WHOSE CORRUPT *SOUL* LAY CAPTIVE IN A CRYSTAL EGG ABOUT HIS WAIST...

...A VULNERABILITY CLAW'S TWISTED RIGHT HAND HAD SOMEHOW *SENSED* -- AND HAD *CRUSHED* INTO OBLIVION...

...ALLOWING THE ELUSIVE *PRIZE* TO FALL INTO CLAW'S GRASP... AND ALLOWING THE GRIMSTONE QUEST TO AT LAST END IN --













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BUT WHILE STARTLED HEADS TURN TO GREET THE UNEXPECTED CRIES, MUCH HARSHER TONES ASSAIL THE WALLS OF CASTLE DARKMORN, SOME LEAGUES DISTANT TO THE NORTHEAST...

WELL, MIFTUNG, ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH THE RESULTS OF YOUR BUMBLING ATTEMPTS AT WIZARDRY?

SIRE, I TRIED--

AYE, TRIED AND FAILED! THAT ACCURSED BARBARIAN NOW HAS THE ONE WEAPON THAT CAN SLAY THE MONSTER I SUMMONED TO DESTROY HIM!

I KNOW NOT WHY, BUT THAT MAN IS THE ONLY THREAT TO MY EVENTUAL RULE OF THE FIFTEEN WORLDS, AND IF HE CONTINUES TO LIVE--

--YOU WON'T!

BUT, KING OCCULAS, AS I EXPLAINED BEFORE, THERE ARE FORCES AT WORK HERE. POWERFUL FORCES THAT--

SPARE ME YOUR WORDS, YOU MISERABLE LACKEY, AND PAY HEED TO MINE!

FOR I ASSURE YOU THAT IF YOU FAIL ONCE MORE--

--THERE WILL BE NO NEXT TIME!

NO, MY LORD, THERE WILL BE NO... NEXT TIME...

WHILE IN THE SOUTH...

THAT'S RIGHT, GOOD SIRS, FATHER *REFUSES* TO LEAVE THE VILLAGE! EVEN THOUGH TO STAY IS TO COURT *DEATH*!

HE'S A GOOD MAN, BUT HE'S SPENT HIS WHOLE LIFE HERE--

--AND SWEARS THAT *NOTHING* WILL MAKE HIM LEAVE HIS--

"--HOME..."

AH, DAUGHTER, YOU'RE BACK. AND I SEE YOU'VE BROUGHT *GUESTS*.

WOULD YOU CARE TO OFFER THEM SOME *TEA*...?

OH, PLEASE, FATHER, YOU *MUST* LEAVE WITH US! I'D HOPED THESE WARRIORS COULD HELP *CONVINCE* YOU OF THIS FOLLY AND--

I'M SORRY, DAUGHTER.

BUT IT WILL TAKE MORE THAN A PAIR OF RATHER CRUDE-LOOKING *RUFFIANS* TO--

ENOUGH, OLD MAN. WE'VE WASTED TOO MUCH *TIME* ALREADY. THE GIRL WANTS YOU TO GO--SO *GO* YOU WILL!

W-WAIT! I-I JUST WANTED YOU TO TALK TO HIM! JUST *TALK*!

UNF?!

PLEASE! Y-YOU MIGHT *HURT* HIM! LET HIM GO, YOU ANIMAL!

LET HIM--

--GO...?

HURRIEDLY, THE TWO WARRIORS ROUND A CRUMBLING CORNER--

--HOPING TO FIND *SANCTUARY* FOR THEIR UNWILLING BURDENS BEFORE ENCOUNTERING THE *DANGER* THEY KNOW LURKS NEAR...

IT IS A HOPE WITHOUT FOUNDATION...
MMRRGGHH
EEEEEEE
UH, O-ON SECOND THOUGHT, P-PERHAPS I COULD USE A SHORT VACATION IN THE COUNTRY...

BUT THE GIRL AND THE OLD MAN ARE QUICKLY FORGOTTEN, AS...

WELL, FRIEND CLAW, IT SEEMS WE'VE FOUND *N'HGLTHSS!*

SO BY ALL MEANS, LET US GREET HIM *PROPERLY!*

THWATCH

BUT...

I... I FORGOT! THE BEAST IS *IMPERVIOUS* TO STEEL!

AYE, GHILKYN, BUT WE'VE SOMETHING *MORE* THAN STEEL NOW! LET US SEE IF IT DOES US--

!?!

--SOME *GOOD!*

SKRMASH

IT DOES!

THE *BLADE!* I-IT *GLOWED* AS IT STRUCK THE MONSTER! AS IF LIT WITH *BLUE FIRE!*

AYE, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE BEAST *FELT* IT!

HE FELT IT!

STAY BACK, HILL-PRINCE! THE FATES CAST THIS BATTLE BETWEEN N'HGLTHSS AND I!

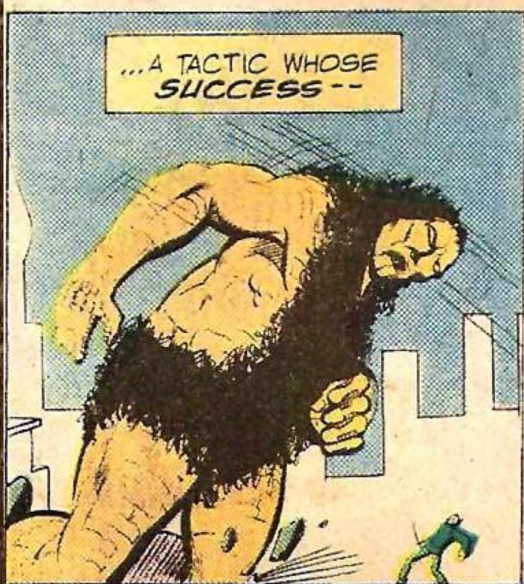
AND I THINK IT'S TIME MY LEATHERY *OPPONENT--*

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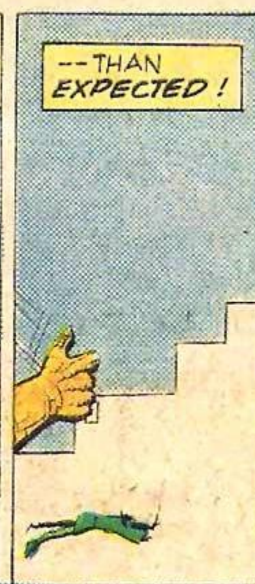

--WAS CUT DOWN TO SIZE!


CONFUSION CLOUDS THE FOUL MON-STER'S EYES, AS TENDONS SNAP LIKE TAUT CORDS...
KROOD!


...GIVING CLAW THE OPPORTUNITY TO SWING HIS SUPERNATURAL BLADE IN A SECOND ARC...


...A TACTIC WHOSE SUCCESS--


--MAY PROVE SOME-WHAT MORE DIS-ASTROUS--


--THAN EXPECTED!

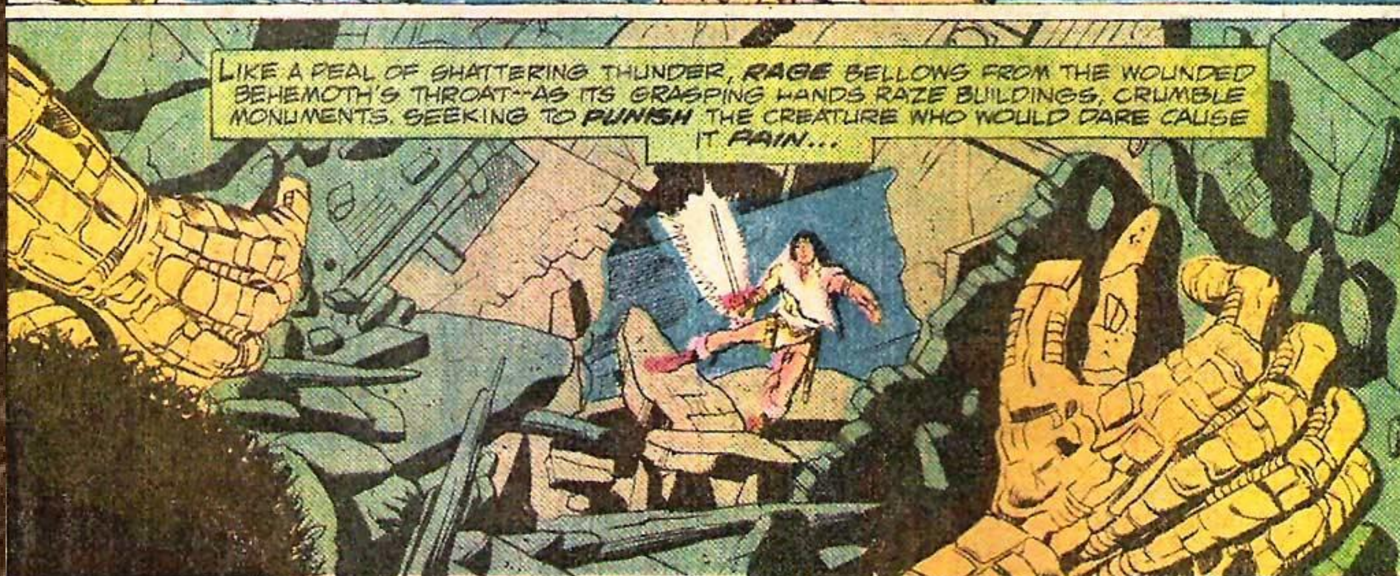

GHILKYN!


SKRASH


CURSE YOU, DEMON! IT'S ME YOU WANT! LEAVE MY FRIEND--


--ALONE...



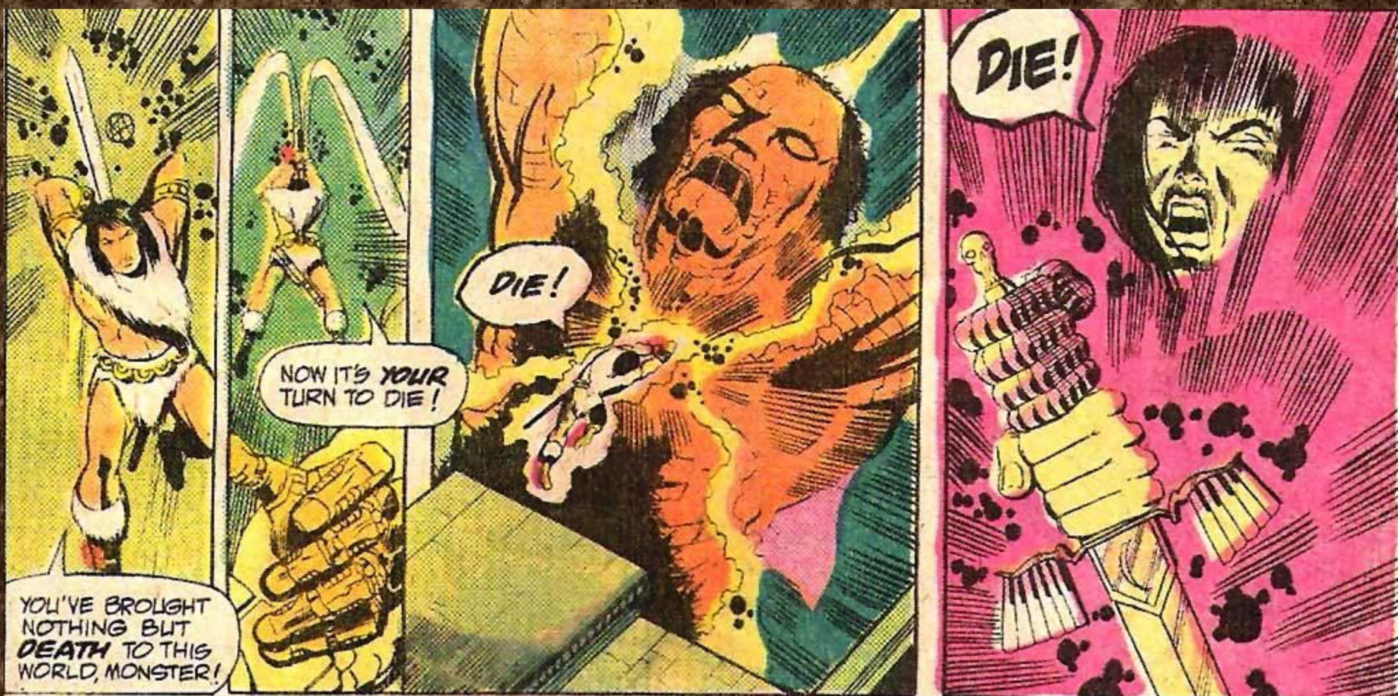








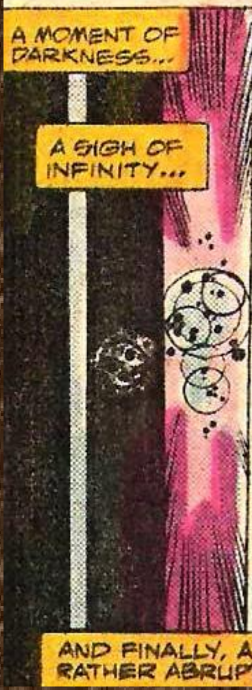
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YOU'VE BROUGHT NOTHING BUT DEATH TO THIS WORLD, MONSTER!
NOW IT'S YOUR TURN TO DIE!
DIE!
DIE!


CULMINATION: AS IN A BLAZE OF SUN-BRIGHT ENERGY, MOONTHORN PERFORMS ITS ULTIMATE TASK...
...CASTING THE LUMBERING ORANGE BULK CALLED N'HGLTHSS ...BACK THROUGH DIMENSIONAL DOORWAYS TO THE VOID FROM WHENCE IT CAME...


THOUGH WHAT EFFECTS THAT EXPULSION WILL HAVE ON A CERTAIN DARK-MANED WARRIOR--


--REMAIN YET TO BE SEEN...
C-CLAW...?


A MOMENT OF DARKNESS...
A SIGH OF INFINITY...
AND FINALLY, A RATHER ABRUPT--


--AWAKENING!
DIE, YOU BLOODY FIEND, DI--eh? WH-WHAT-- WHERE AM I?!

BY THE GODS, HAS N'HGLTHSS SLAIN **ME** AS WELL? WHAT MANNER OF **HELL** IS THIS?

PLEASE, MY LORD, BE CALM. PERHAPS SOME **REFRESHMENTS** WOULD HELP TO--**OH!**

LEAVE ME ALONE, WOMAN! MY LIFE HAS BEEN TOYED WITH **OVERMUCH** THESE PAST DAYS--AND I WOULD KNOW **WHY!**

EVEN IF I HAVE TO--WHA? MY CLOTHING! EVEN MY **GARMENTS** HAVE BEEN ALTERED!

NATURALLY, LORD CLAW! SURELY YOU DON'T THINK **TATTERED FURS** A SUITABLE RAIMENT FOR ONE WHO SERVES--

--**THE GODS OF ELDER LIGHT!**

YOU! I... I **KNOW** YOU... SOMEHOW! BUT HOW--?

RELAX, LORD CLAW. FOR IN A MOMENT... YOU WILL KNOW **ALL**...

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LIKE ICE TOUCHED BY SUDDEN FLAME, REALITY MELTS-- GIVING WAY TO VISIONS AS THE ELDER GOD'S VOICE CONTINUES TO WHISPER IN CLAW'S MIND...

THE PARTICULAR MULTIVERSE IN WHICH YOU DWELL, LORD CLAW, IS COMPOSED OF FIFTEEN DIMENSIONS. EIGHT POSITIVE PLANES--SEVEN OF WHICH ARE CONTROLLED PRIMARILY BY THE LEGIONS OF LIGHT--AND SEVEN NEGATIVE PLANES, OR VOIDS, BETWEEN.

REGRETTABLY, ALL OF THOSE SEVEN VOIDS ARE DOMINATED BY FORCES OF DISORDER-- OUR ETERNAL ENEMIES, THE SHADOW-GODS.

TO THIS END, THE SHADOW-GODS HAVE CHOSEN KING OCCULAS OF THE YELLOW EYE AS THEIR AGENT IN THE GRAND STRUGGLE, WHILE OUR CHAMPION, LORD CLAW... IS YOU!

THE REMAINING PLANE-- YOUR PLANE--IS THE BALANCE WORLD, THE KEY TO A CONFLICT EVEN I CANNOT EXPLAIN FULLY-- BUT ONE WHOSE IMPORTANCE IS ONLY TOO CLEAR.

FOR WHOEVER CONTROLS THAT FINAL PLANE SHALL HAVE THE ADVANTAGE AND POWER TO TOPPLE THE COSMIC EQUILIBRIUM--AND GAIN RULE OF THE ENTIRE MULTIVERSE!




THE REASONS FOR OUR CHOICE ARE COMPLEX--AND BEGIN GENERATIONS AGO WITH ONE OF YOUR FOREBEARS.
"A CURIOUS AND COURAGEOUS MAN WHO SOUGHT TO BETTER HIS WORLD BY SEEKING KNOWLEDGE FROM OTHERS...


"BUT DABBLING IN ARCANE LORE IS A CHANCY PASTIME AT BEST--AND ONE NIGHT A LURKING DEMON WAS ACCIDENTALLY RELEASED...


"AN INFERNAL ESSENCE THAT SOUGHT VORACIOUSLY TO POSSESS YOUR STARTLED ANCESTOR...
"...AND IT WAS ONLY THROUGH DESPERATE COUNTER-SPELLS THAT THE CREATURE WAS AT LAST DRIVEN BACK TO ITS NAMELESS NETHERWORLD...

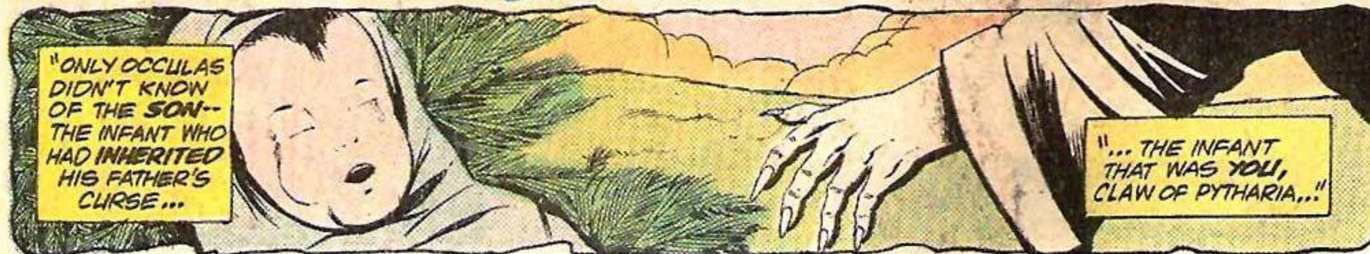

"BUT THE EXORCISM WAS NOT ENTIRELY SUCCESSFUL...
"...FOR THOUGH THE DEMON HAD FLED THIS DIMENSION--


"--IT HAD LEFT SOME OF ITS SPIRITUAL SUBSTANCE IN THE CARELESS CONJURER'S BLOOD...

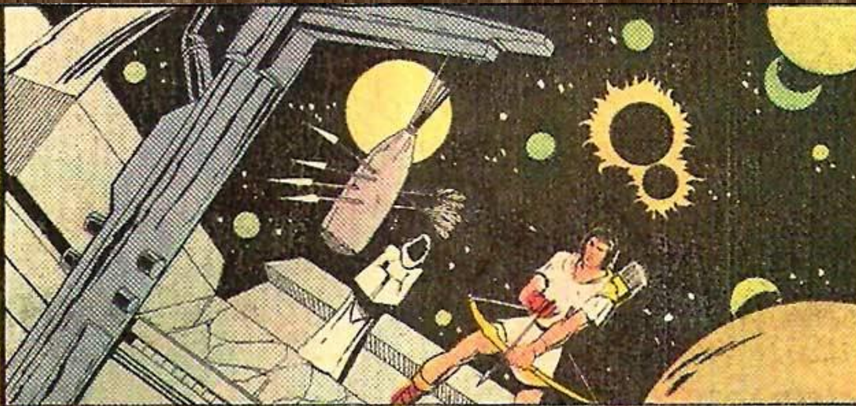

"...A TAINT WHOSE PHYSICAL MANIFESTATION WAS A TWISTED FUR-TUFTED HAND!"


THE POWER IN THAT DEMONIC HAND LAY DORMANT, GROWING STRONGER THROUGH THE YEARS AS THE TRAIT WAS PASSED FROM PARENT TO CHILD.


"UNTIL THE DAY WHEN OCCULAS LEARNED THAT SUCH POWER COULD BE A THREAT TO THE DARK FORCES HE SERVED--
"--AND SO HAD THE LATEST POSSESSOR OF THE DEMON HAND SLAUGHTERED...


"ONLY OCCULAS DIDN'T KNOW OF THE SON--THE INFANT WHO HAD INHERITED HIS FATHER'S CURSE...
"...THE INFANT THAT WAS YOU, CLAW OF PYTHARIA..."

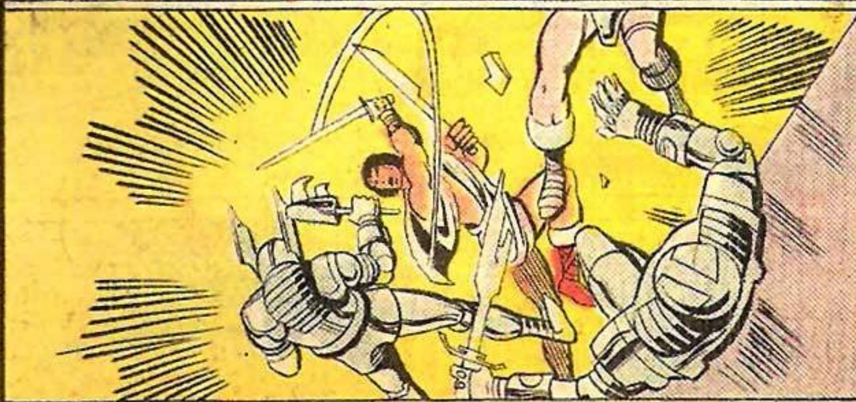
WE BROUGHT YOU TO **OUR REALM** THEN, KNOWING THAT THE ABILITY TO WIELD THE POWERS OF OUR **ENEMIES** WOULD MAKE YOU A **FORMIDABLE** CHAMPION INDEED!



AND SO YOU GREW WITH US, AND WERE GIVEN TRAINING--IN ARCHERY, DISC-CUTTERS, SWORDSMAN-SHIP, THROWING STICKS--UNTIL NO LIVING MORTAL COULD MATCH YOUR SKILLS. **IT** WAS THEN YOU WERE DEEMED READY FOR... **RELEASE!**



A SPECIAL **GAUNTLET** WAS FITTED TO YOUR HAND, A CRIMSON GLOVE MADE OF **ORACULUM**-- A METAL THAT WOULD NOT ONLY SHIELD YOU FROM THE GROWING INFLUENCE OF THE DEMON HAND, BUT WOULD ALSO ACT AS YOUR **PRO-TECTOR**--









BUT THE **SHADOW-GODS** HAD LEARNED OF OUR PLAN, AND SO CAST A **SPELL** ABOUT YOU AS YOU PASSED FROM OUR DOMAIN TO YOUR OWN DIMENSION... ROBBING YOU OF YOUR SWORD--



CONTINUED ON 4TH PAGE FOLLOWING

YOUR SUBSEQUENT ACTIONS IN SURMOUNTING THE OBSTACLES NECESSARY TO **REGAIN** MOONTHORN, EVEN WITHOUT KNOWING THAT SUCH WAS YOUR **DESTINY**, HAVE BEEN ADMIRABLE -- AND HAVE **JUSTIFIED** OUR CHOICE OF HEROES.

THUS HAVE YOU PROVEN YOURSELF **WORTHY** TO BE THE SERVANT OF LIGHT, LORD CLAW.

CONGRATULATIONS...

CONGRATULATIONS?! YOU TELL ME I'VE BEEN **USED** SINCE CHILDHOOD--

--MOVED LIKE A PAWN BY FORCES I CAN'T COMPREHEND IN A GAME I NEVER KNEW EXISTED--AND THEN YOU **CONGRATULATE** ME FOR THAT?

THEN LEARN THIS, GODLING, AND LEARN IT **WELL**! THE PAST IS **DEAD**!

AND BE HE MORTAL OR MAN-DEMON, CLAW OF PYTHARIA...

SNAKT

--BELONGS TO **NO ONE**!

HE IS HEADSTRONG, THIS HUMAN.

AYE, BUT **FATE** IS STRONGER THAN **OBSTINACY**.

HE WILL BE BACK...

TIME AND TRANSITION MOVE RAPIDLY...AND SOON, AFTER CLAW'S SUDDEN, SHIMMERING REAPPEARANCE IN THE RUBBLED VILLAGE HAS BEEN EXPLAINED AND A REQUEST HAS BEEN MADE...

YOUR TALE ASTOUNDS ME, FRIEND CLAW-- BUT AYE, I'VE A **MOUNT** READY FOR YOU.

THOUGH I'M AFRAID IT WAS **CHANGED** SOMEWHAT BY N'HGLTHSS' PASSING -- LIKE THOSE **DOGS** WE ENCOUNTERED EARLIER. HOWEVER, THE ANIMAL SEEMS **SOUND** ENOUGH.

AND IF YOU'LL GIVE ME A MOMENT TO FIND **ANOTHER**, I'LL --

NO, GHILKYN.

I NEVER KNEW MY FATHER-- BUT NOW I **DO** KNOW HIS **MURDERER**. AND THAT LEAVES ME WITH A DEBT I MUST PAY... ALONE.

I...UNDERSTAND, MY FRIEND. I WISH YOU GOOD FORTUNE-- AND HOPE THAT SOME DAY WE'LL MEET AGAIN!

AYE, HILL-PRINCE, I'M SURE THAT WE WILL. IN THIS WORLD--

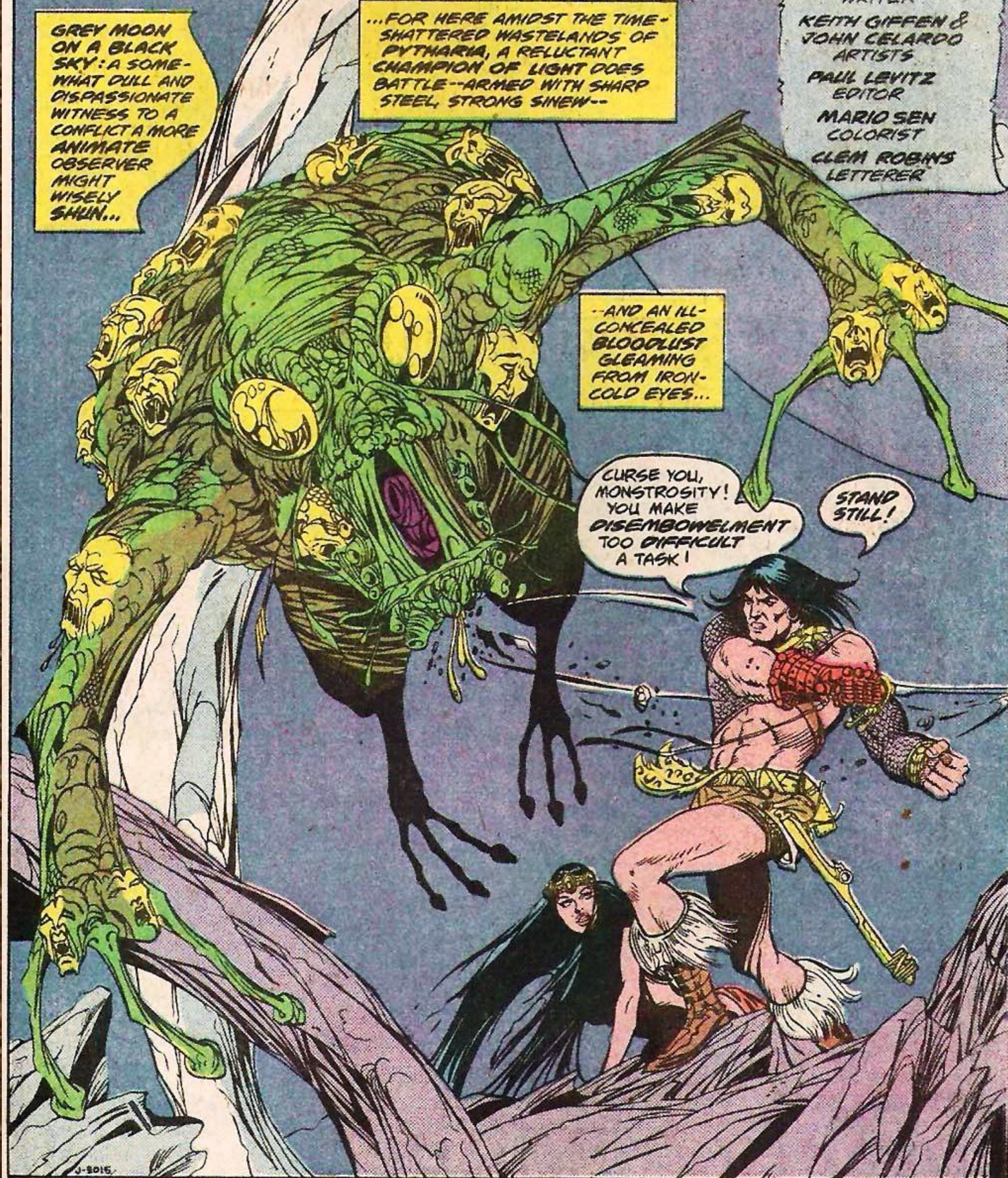
--OR IN SOME OTHER...

NEXT ISSUE: THE CONFRONTATION-- **CLAW VERSUS OCCULAS** IN A SUPERNATURAL BATTLE FOR THE UNIVERSE--AND TWO SHALL **DIE**!

ON SALE DURING THE THIRD WEEK IN AUG.

CLAW THE UNCONQUERED

THE EATER OF SOULS!



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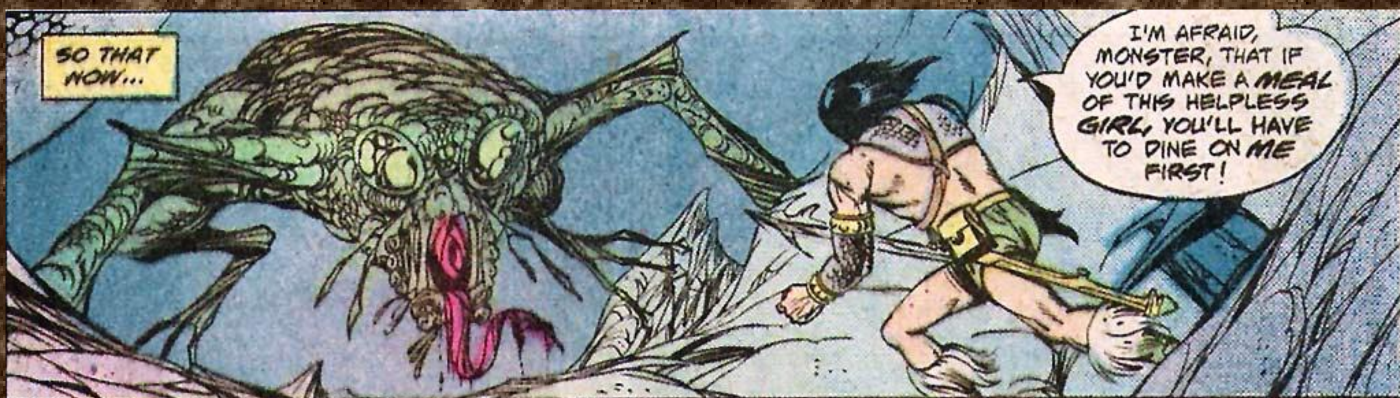
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I MUST ADMIT YOU TRY MY SKILL, DEMON-SCUM, BUT UNLESS YOU'VE A MORE FORMIDABLE DEFENSE THAN THAT INFERNAL TOAD HOP--
SPLOM


IT DOES...
AAAGH!


THE UNEXPECTED WOUND SEEPS AND THROBS, BUT IT IS NOT PAIN THAT NOW ETCHES THE GRIM BARBARIAN'S FACE. IT IS MERELY--


--ANGER: AT BOTH, THE GOD OF CHANCE, FOR ROUTING HIS PATH TO VENGEANCE THROUGH THIS DOOM-STREWN WILDERLAND, CAUSING HIM TO COME UPON A SCENE OF AWE AND ABOMINATION...
ANGER: AT FORCES HE BARELY COMPREHENDS, FORCES THAT PIT AN UNWANTED SENSE OF JUSTICE AGAINST HIS SCATHING THIRST FOR REVENGE...
ANGER: AT HIMSELF, FOR ALLOWING THAT SELFSAME SENSE OF FAIRNESS TO RULE HIS DARK AND DRIVEN SOUL...
2


SO THAT NOW...
I'M AFRAID, MONSTER, THAT IF YOU'D MAKE A MEAL OF THIS HELPLESS GIRL, YOU'LL HAVE TO DINE ON ME FIRST!


THOUGH I TRUST YOU'LL UNDERSTAND IF I DON'T CHOOSE TO SLIDE DOWN YOUR SLIMY THROAT--


SLATCH
--WILLINGLY!


SPLAP


HO, WART-SKIN! NOT SO DANGEROUS WHEN YOU'RE MISSING A LEG, EH?
AND I WAGER YOU'LL BE EVEN LESS SO WITHOUT YOUR HEA--




WHO-- THE GIRL?! B-BUT ...WHY?!

UNFORTUNATELY, SUCH PURPOSE MUST REMAIN A MYSTERY FOR THE NONCE, FOR AT THAT MOMENT--

--CURIOSITY TURNS TO GAPE-MOUTHED TERROR--

--WHILE THE SOFT AND LISSOME LADY CLAW HAD SOUGHT TO SAVE--

--TURNS TO SOMETHING ELSE--

--ENTIRELY!

BE IT UNDERSTOOD: CLAW OF PYTHARIA IS SOMETHING MORE THAN A MERE SWINGER OF SWORDS, YET STILL, HE RETAINS CERTAIN CHARACTERISTICS COMMON IN LESS ENLIGHTENED WARRIORS...

AMONG THEM, A RATHER STRONG SENSE OF, SHALL WE SAY--

--PRACTICALITY...?
4

WHILE LEAGUES NORTHWARD, FEELINGS OF A SOMEWHAT MORE OMINOUS NATURE ARE BEING EVIDENCED BY--
--KING OCCULAS OF THE YELLOW EYE!
DO YOU SEE, WIZARD? THAT BLASTED SAVAGE RIDES FOR CASTLE DARKMORN ONCE MORE!
I-I KNOW, SIRE. 'TIS...UNFORTUNATE.
UNFORTUNATE?! YOU WRETCHED EXCUSE FOR A HUMAN ANIMAL--IT'S DISASTROUS! IF HE REACHES THE CASTLE ALIVE, MY ULTIMATE RULE OF THE MULTIVERSE COULD BE DOOMED!
YOUR SORCERIES HAVE FAILED UP TO NOW, MIFTUNG, AND YOU'LL HAVE BUT ONE CHANCE MORE! IF THAT FAILS--
--WELL, LET ME PUT IT THIS WAY: I'M VERY FOND OF ZORINDA HERE. SHE... PLEASES ME. CAN YOU UNDERSTAND THAT?
UH, Y-YES, SIRE.
GOOD, THEN--
SNAP
RRRIIIZZZKKK
--IF I CAN DO THAT WITH NO REMORSE WHATSOEVER TO A CREATURE WHO PLEASES ME, CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT I'LL DO TO YOU IF YOU DISPLEASE ME...?
I, UM, B-BELIEVE I CAN. GULP. SIRE...
YES, THE LIFE OF A COURT CONJUROR CAN BE AN UNSTABLE ONE AT TIMES--
5

--AS UNSTABLE AS THE WEATHER OVER THE DARKLING PLAINS OF PYTHARIA--

--WHERE A BLACK-MANED BARBARIAN IS ATTEMPTING TO SURVIVE A STORM WHOSE ORIGINS ARE AS SUDDEN--

--AS THEY ARE SINISTER...

I LIKE IT NOT! A TEMPEST SPROUTING FROM CLOUDLESS SKIES STINKS OF WIZARDRY!

AND UNLESS WE FIND SHELTER SOON...

IT IS PERHAPS COINCIDENCE THAT CLAW SPIES THE TWINKLING OF A DISTANT LIGHT AT THIS PARTICULAR MOMENT...

AYE, PERHAPS...

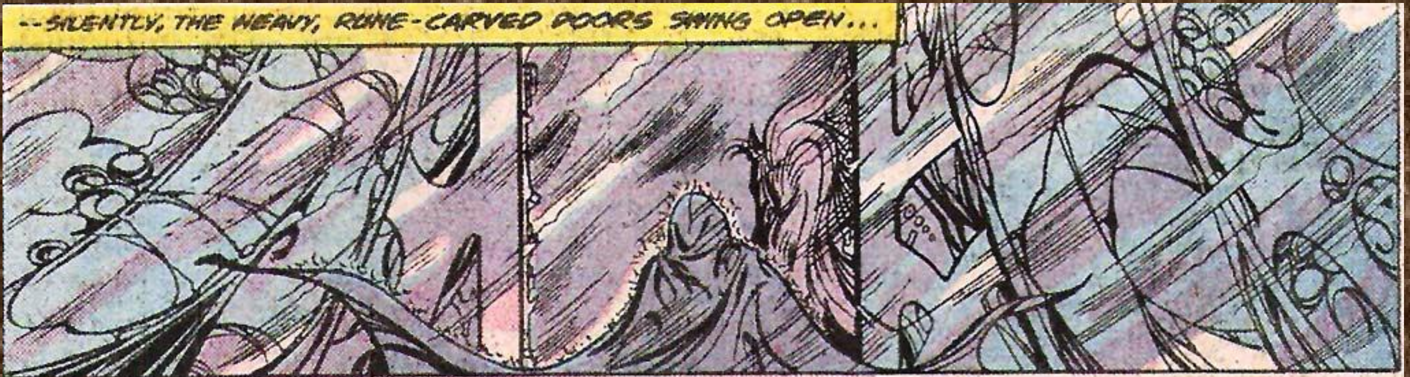
AND SOON, AFTER A HARD, SLIPPERY RIDE HAS BROUGHT HORSE AND RIDER TO THE SOURCE OF THAT ILLUMINATION...

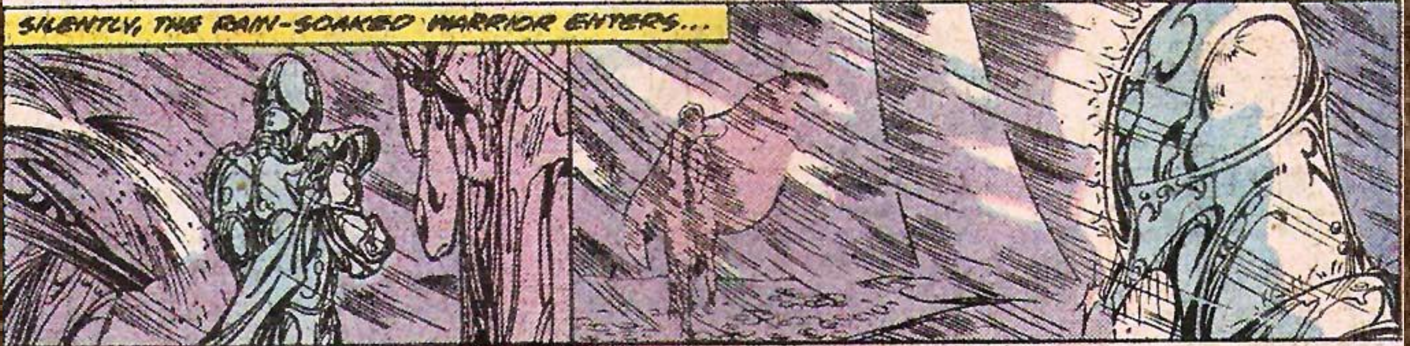
HO, GUARDSMAN! OPEN YOUR GATES! CAN'T YOU SEE I'M A MAN, NOT A FISH?

FOR A MOMENT, THE LONE SENTRY STANDS STARING... AND THEN, WITH AN ODD FLUIDITY OF MOTION, TURNS TO A ROW OF LEVERS AS--

CLANK CLANK!

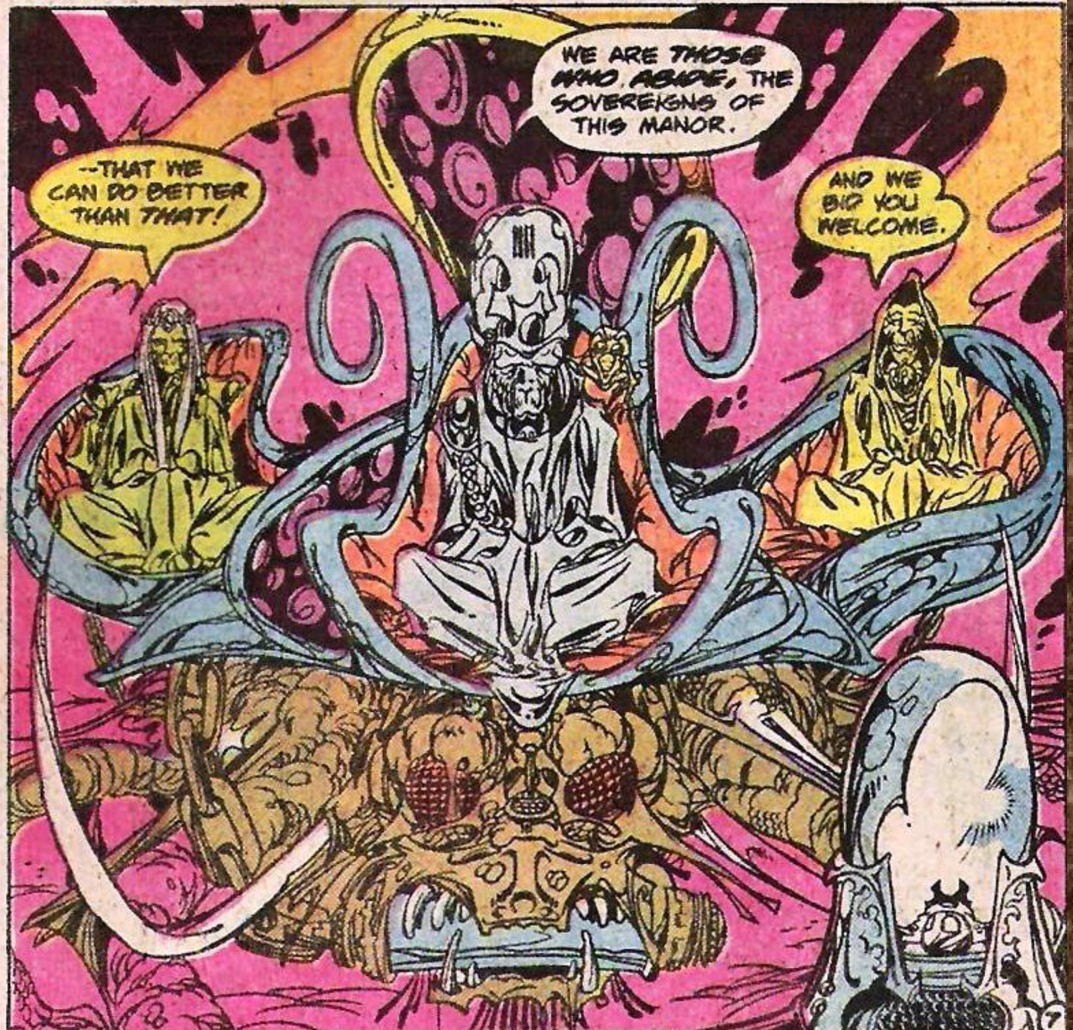
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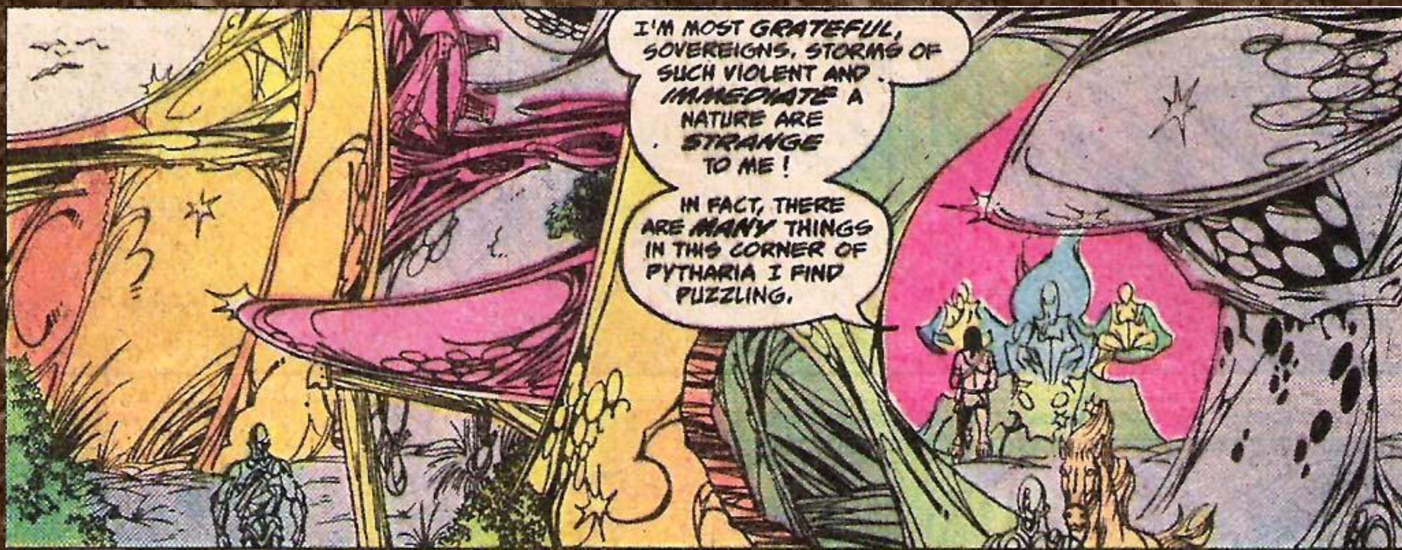

--SILENTLY, THE HEAVY, RUNE-CARVED DOORS SWING OPEN...


SILENTLY, THE RAIN-SOAKED WARRIOR ENTERS...


AND SILENTLY, THE RAGING TEMPEST DIES--AS IF HAVING FULFILLED SOME AS YET UNKNOWN DESIGN...


WHILE, INSIDE...
I THANK YOU FOR YOUR HOSPITALITY, KIND SIRS. NOW, IF YOU COULD POINT ME TOWARDS A DRY CORNER WHERE I MIGHT LAY MY BLANKET--
OH, I'M CERTAIN, GOOD TRAVELER--


--THAT WE CAN DO BETTER THAN THAT!
WE ARE THOSE WHO ABIDE, THE SOVEREIGNS OF THIS MANOR.
AND WE BID YOU WELCOME.
7


I'M MOST GRATEFUL, SOVEREIGNS. STORMS OF SUCH VIOLENT AND IMMEDIATE A NATURE ARE STRANGE TO ME!
IN FACT, THERE ARE MANY THINGS IN THIS CORNER OF PYTHARIA I FIND PUZZLING.


AH, THESE ARE TROUBLED TIMES, TRAVELER, AND ONE MUST EXPECT THE UNUSUAL!
FOR EXAMPLE, THERE WAS A GIRL EARLIER TODAY WHO--
BUT COME, SUP WITH US--AND PERHAPS FORGET FOR A WHILE.


AND SOON, IN A CHAMBER WHOSE SIZE AND OPULENCE WOULD RIVAL THE DINING HALL OF OCCULAS HIMSELF...
I TRUST OUR SIMPLE FARE IS TO YOUR LIKING, TRAVELER?
THE NAME IS CLAW, GOOD HOST --AND CALLING THIS MEAL "SIMPLE" IS LIKE CALLING THE VARCANUM ALPS A "SLIGHT INCLINE"!


IN TRUTH, I'VE NEVER ENCOUNTERED SUCH--


WHA-- BY THE GODS!


THE FRUIT! 'TIS ALIVE!
HMMMNNNN
8

RELAX, FRIEND CLAW. THE FRUIT MERELY SINGS IN GRATITUDE FOR BEING CONSUMED.

AYE, 'TIS A COMMON ENOUGH TRAIT IN FOODS PLUCKED FROM DIMENSIONS OTHER THAN OUR OWN.

YOU... PLUNDER THE NETHERWORLDS? THEN, YOU MUST BE SORCERERS!

OH, WE DABBLE IN THE ARCANE ARTS-- BUT ONLY CASUALLY, FOR AMUSEMENT. NOW, PLEASE, DO FINISH YOUR MEAL.

MMMMMMMMMMMMMM

FOR A MOMENT, THERE IS HESITATION--

--BUT THOUGH THE PRESENCE OF SORCERY IS AS DISCONCERTING AS THE THICK, ALIEN SCENT OF THE UNSPEAKING SERVANTS, THE FOOD IS GOOD, THE MANOR IS DRY...

AND SO, AFTER THE BANQUET HAS ENDED...

WE TRUST YOU FIND THE ACCOMODATIONS SUITABLE, OUTLANDER!

SLEEP WELL.

KSNAP

AYE, THAT I WILL...

...NOW!

HOWEVER, IT IS SAID THAT PEACEFUL SLUMBER IS RESERVED ONLY FOR THOSE WITHOUT **CONSCIENCE**--

--A QUALITY WHICH, REGRETTABLY, CLAW OF PYTHARIA HAS AS YET BEEN UNABLE TO **DISCARD...**

AND THUS IS HIS SLEEP BESET WITH **GHOSTS**: IMAGES OF AN INFANT BORN WITH THE TAINT OF **DEMON-BLOOD** IN HIS VEINS, AND INHUMAN **POWER** MANIFEST IN HIS FUR-TUFTED RIGHT HAND...

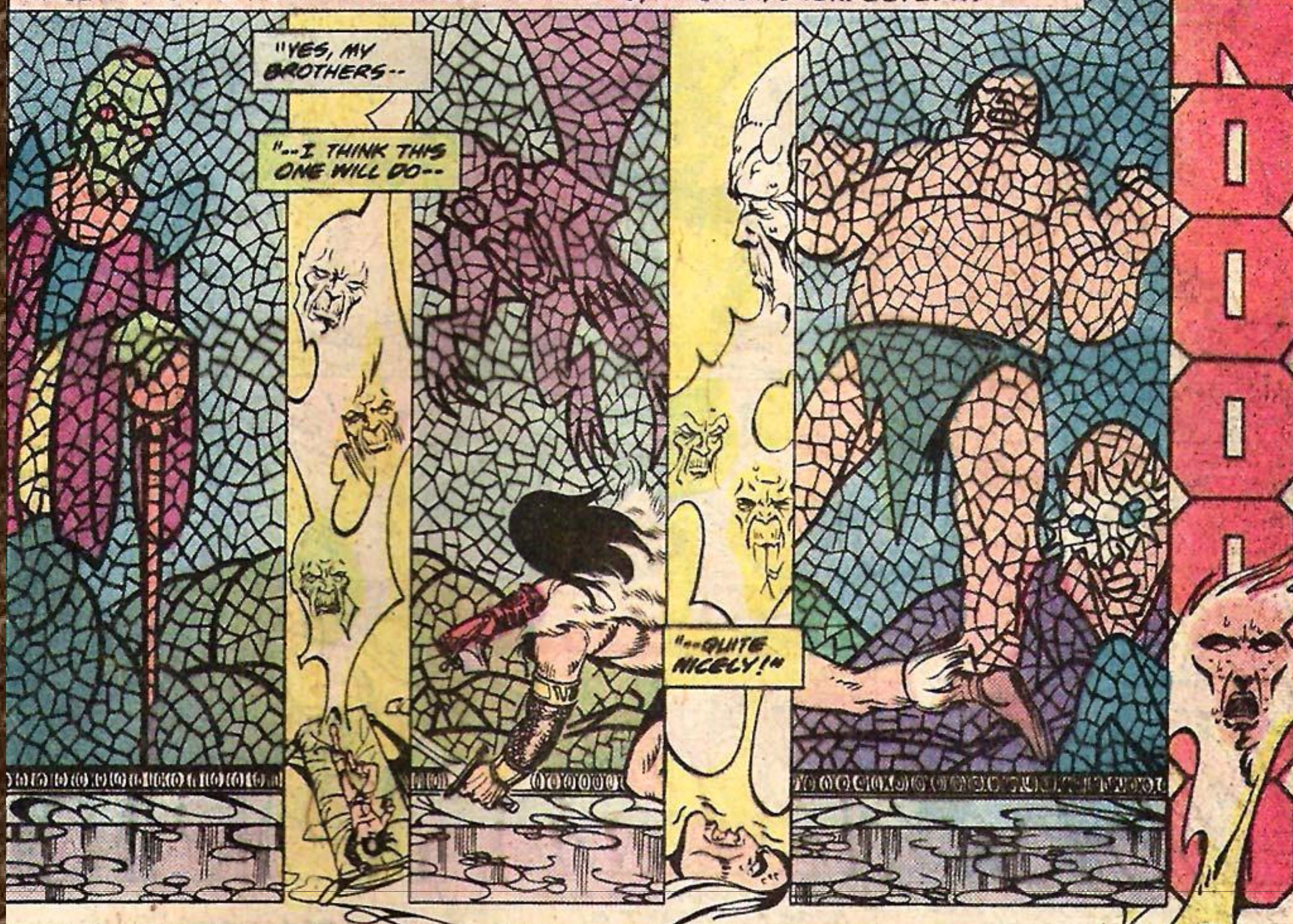
A POWER THAT LED THE ORPHANED CHILD TO BE RAISED BY THE **GODS OF ELDER LIGHT**, TO BE TRAINED IN ALL FORMS OF WEAPONRY AND, AFTER RECEIVING A MYSTERIOUSLY SENTIENT **GAUNTLET** TO SHIELD HIM FROM THE DIABOLICAL **INFLUENCE** OF THE HAND, TO BE **RELEASED** TO WALK THE WORLD AS AN UNWILLING WARRIOR AGAINST--

--THE **SHADOW GODS**, CREATURES OF INCONCEIVABLE EVIL WHOSE STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL OF THE **FIFTEEN WORLDS** THREATENS THE **COSMIC BALANCE** ITSELF... DEMONS WHO HAVE CHOSEN AS THEIR **OWN** DARK CHAMPION--

--OCCULAS OF THE YELLOW EYE, THE SAME DESPOT WHO HAD ORDERED CLAW'S PARENTS MURDERED, AND AGAINST WHOM CLAW EVEN NOW SEEKS **RETRIBUTION...**



CONTINUED ON 5TH PAGE FOLLOWING



SOTH! FLOATING CRONES AND DANCING DEVILS! SUCH DREAMS ARE A HIGH PRICE TO PAY FOR A FULL BELLY!

INDEED, WARRIOR...IF, IN TRUTH, THEY ARE DREAMS...

BUT NIGHT, LIKE NIGHTMARES, TENDS TO SHRIVEL WITH AGE --AND AS MORNING COMES TO THE ENCLOSED COURTYARD OF THE SPRAWLING MANOR...

ONCE MORE, GOOD HOSTS, I THANK YOU FOR YOUR HOSPITALITY. BUT NOW, IF YOU'LL HAVE MY STEED BROUGHT 'ROUND--

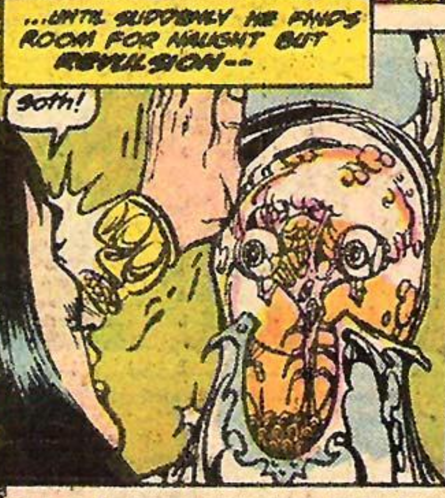
I'M SORRY, LORD CLAW, BUT WE'VE DECIDED YOU'RE JUST WHAT WE NEED.

AND THEREFORE, I'M AFRAID WE CAN'T ALLOW YOU TO LEAVE--









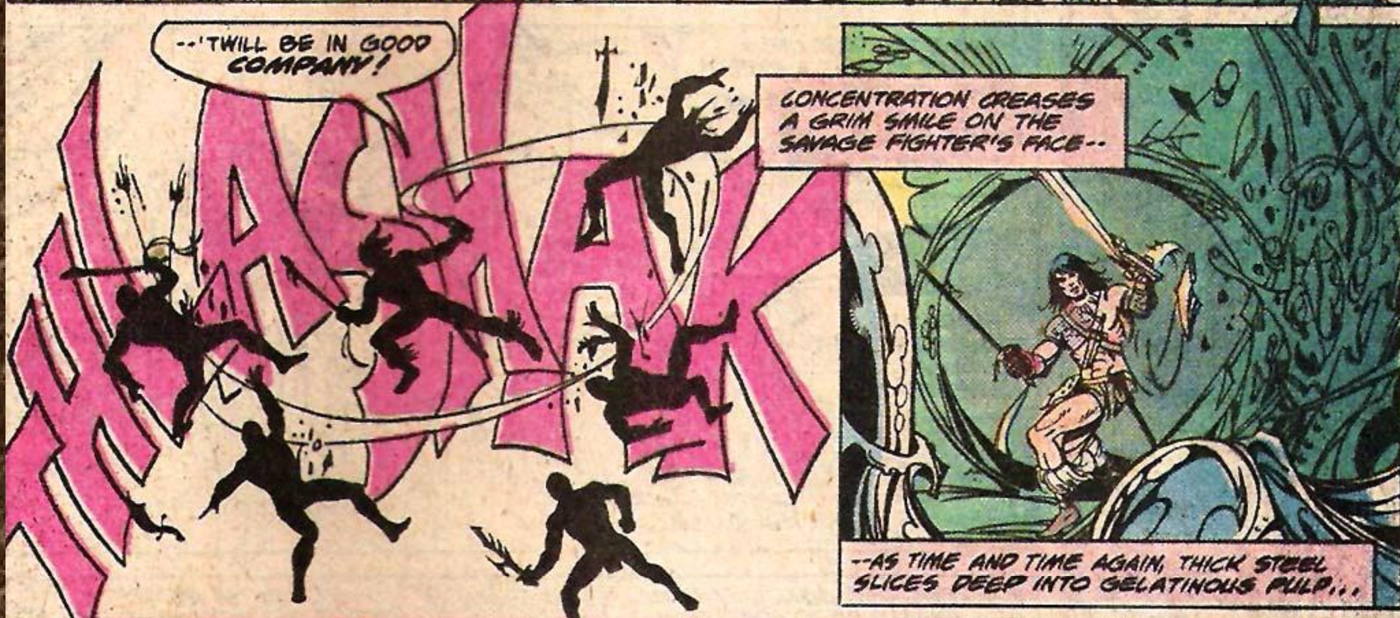


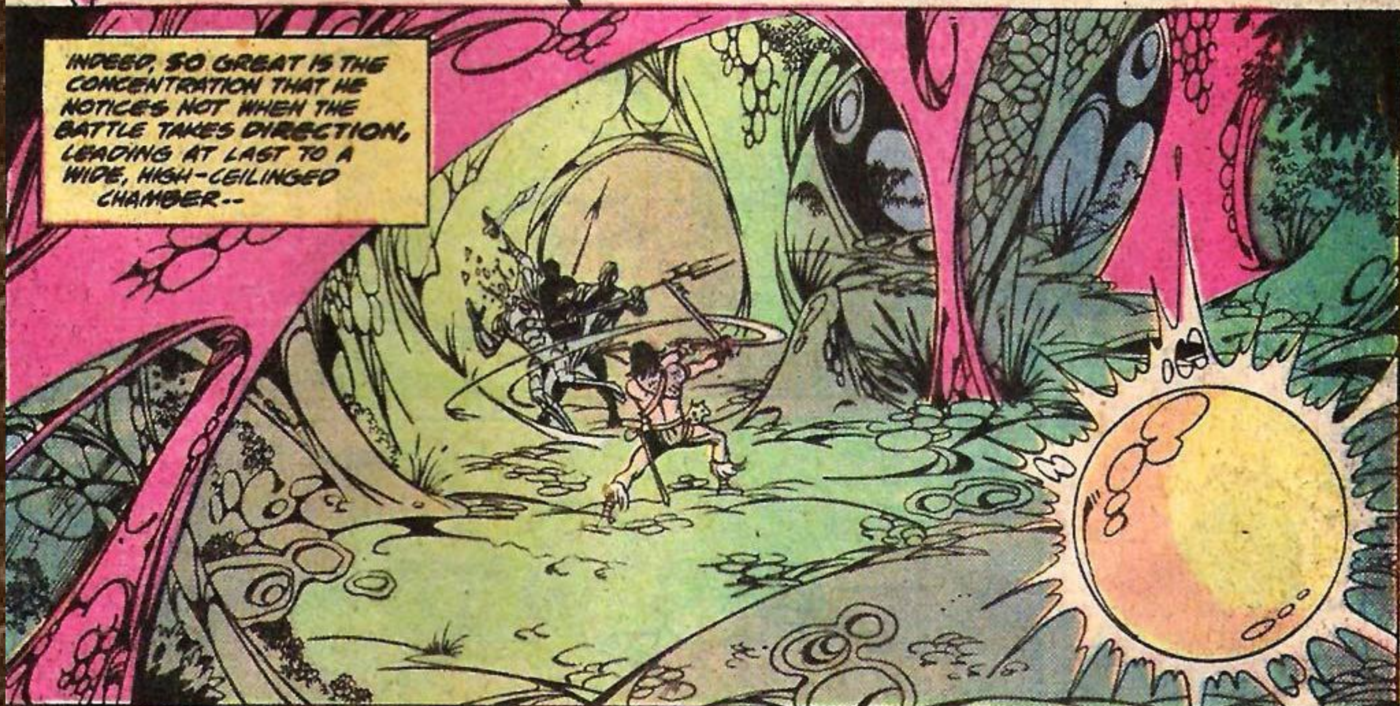




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COME THEN, DOGS! IF I'M TO GREET THE MASTER OF THE FINAL HELL--


--'TWILL BE IN GOOD COMPANY!
THWACHAK
CONCENTRATION CREASES A GRIM SMILE ON THE SAVAGE FIGHTER'S FACE--
--AS TIME AND TIME AGAIN, THICK STEEL SLICES DEEP INTO GELATINOUS PULP...

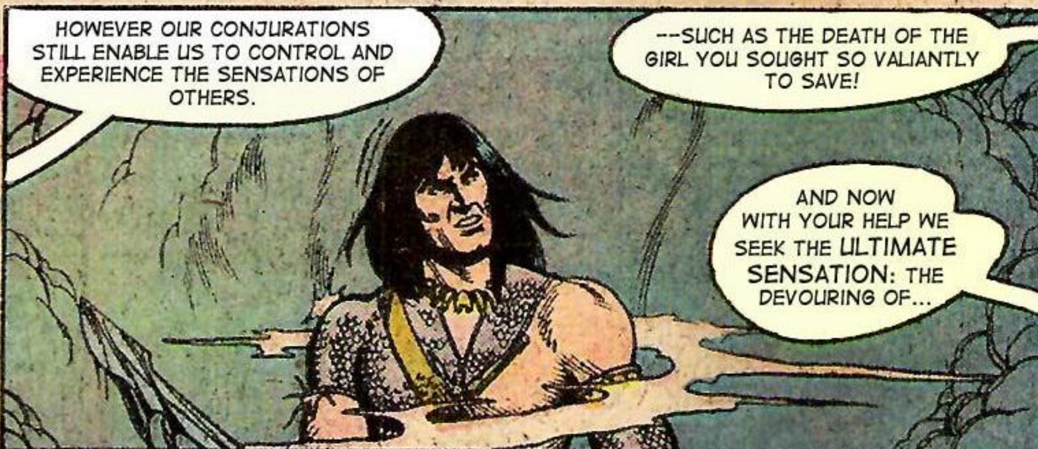

INDEED, SO GREAT IS THE CONCENTRATION THAT HE NOTICES NOT WHEN THE BATTLE TAKES DIRECTION, LEADING AT LAST TO A WIDE, HIGH-CEILINGED CHAMBER--


--WHERE, TO CLAW'S WARY PUZZLEMENT...
THE GUARDS! THEY WITHDRAW! BUT WHY--?
QUITE SIMPLE, OUTLANDER--


WE WISHED THEM TO LEAVE!
AYE, THEY'VE SERVED THEIR PURPOSE--
AS YOU WILL SERVE YOURS!
YOU SEE LORD CLAW, THOSE WHO ABIDE HAVE NOT ALWAYS BEEN AS YOU SEE US NOW.


ONCE WE WERE YOUNG AND SOUGHT JEALOUSLY TO RETAIN THAT YOUTH.
SO WE MADE A PACT WITH THE SHADOW-GODS, CERTAIN FAVORS WERE EXCHANGED
FOR IMMORTALITY


AYE, BUT HE DARK ONES ARE NOT WITHOUT A CERTAIN SENSE OF JEST, FOR THOUGH OUR SOULS REMAIN AGELESS...
OUR BODIES WITHER LIKE AUTUMN RUSHES!
DAMNING US TO A LIFE WITHOUT MOVEMENT OR SENSATION.


HOWEVER OUR CONJURATIONS STILL ENABLE US TO CONTROL AND EXPERIENCE THE SENSATIONS OF OTHERS.
--SUCH AS THE DEATH OF THE GIRL YOU SOUGHT SO VALIANTLY TO SAVE!
AND NOW WITH YOUR HELP WE SEEK THE ULTIMATE SENSATION: THE DEVOURING OF...


A HUMAN SOUL!
EEEYYGGH!
THE GROPING TENDRILS ARE COLD, COLDER THAN THE ICE THAT RAINS FROM A MID-WINTER SKY. BUT FOR ALL THE CUTTING CHILL -- OR PERHAPS BECAUSE OF IT -- THEY BURN...

AND THUS DOES CLAW REACT AS HE WOULD TO ANY FOE WHO WOULD BRING HIM PAIN--

--HE STRIKES!

CHI-KASH

ONLY TO FIND HIS BLOWS AS INEFFECTUAL AS A PAPER CLOAK IN A THUNDERSQUALL--



UNTIL FINALLY, BENUMBED AND QUIVERING, HE GAZES INTO A WORLD OF UNPLEASANT COLORS, STRANDS OF SOUND, ODORS OF THINGS BEST LEFT UNIMAGINED--

--AND A SHUDDER OF FEAR JOINS THOSE OF FROST ALONG HIS SPINE...

HOWEVER, THE ICE-LIMBED NETHERFIEND SUFFERS NO SUCH DISADVANTAGE...

...AS, LOST IN THE THROES OF SOUL-HUNGER...

...IT RIPS, GRABS, TEARS AT ANYTHING IT CAN TOUCH. AND IN THAT HASTE--

--MAKES A GRAVE MISTAKE!

15


FOR IN THE SLENDER SPACE OF A HEARTBEAT, TRANCE-GLAZED EYES SLIDE UPWARDS--


--A WEB-FINGERED HAND GRASPS A WAITING SWORD-HILT--


--AND DEMON-SPAWNED SALVATION ERUPTS!

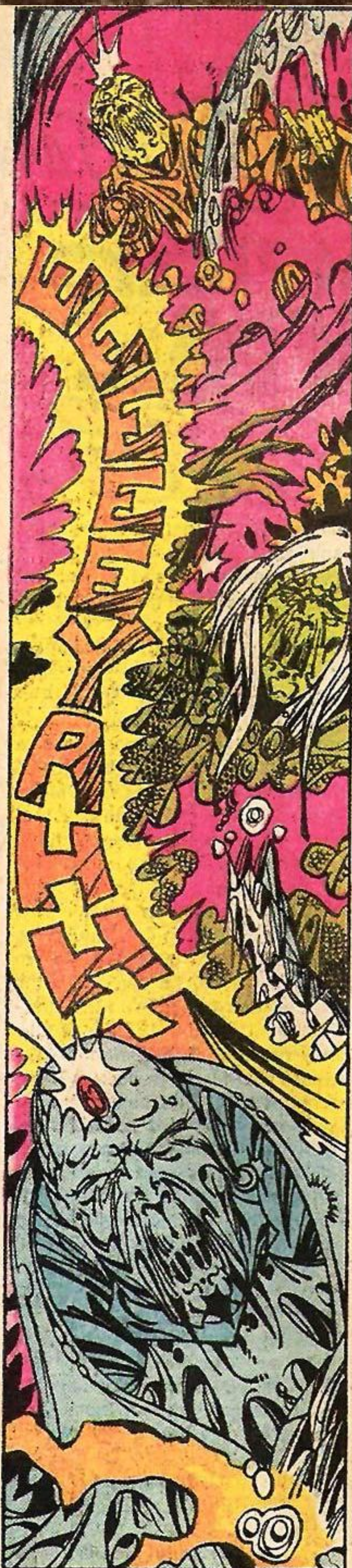

SSRASSSH


A LOW TRILL OF FRUSTRATION FILLS THE CHAMBER, ROILING LIKE SILKEN THUNDER AS ICY TENDRILS SNAKE FORWARD ONCE MORE--


--ONLY TO BE MET IN TURN WITH A SECOND ARC OF SEARING HELL-FIRE!


AND THUS FOR A MOMENT, TIME STANDS STILL. FOR THOUGH THE EATER OF SOULS IS HUNGRY, ITS WOULD-BE PREY PROVES UNEXPECTEDLY BOTHERSOME...
AND SO IT IS THAT THE MONSTER MUST SEEK NOURISHMENT--


--ELSEWHERE!
WHA--? TH-THE THING TURNS!
NO! Y-YOU MUSTN'T! PLEA--
16









AGONY SHRIEKS, MINGLING WITH THE SOUND OF CRACKING BONES AS FRAIL BODIES WRITHE--AND THE PITIFULLY STRUGGLING THOSE WHO ABIDE REALIZE THAT, FOR THEM, THE TORMENT IS JUST BEGINNING...





NEXT ISSUE: AT LAST! THE CATACLYSMIC CONFRONTATION BETWEEN CLAW AND OCCULAS! BE HERE THE 3RD WEEK OF MARCH TO FIND OUT WHO--OR WHAT--SURVIVES: "DEATH AT DARKMORN!"

CLAW THE UNCONQUERED

IT IS GENERALLY ACCEPTED THAT *OCCULAS*, THE KING WITH THE YELLOW EYE, GOVERNS THE LAND-HUNGRY REALM OF *PYTHARIA*. BUT CLOSER TO TRUTH, IT IS THE *SUN* THAT RULES THIS VAST, HEAT-PARCHED KINGDOM. A SUN THAT BAKES THE SOIL, LEAVING IT CRACKED IN LONG BROWN GASHES, BARREN AND INFERTILE...

BUT STILL, THERE ARE *SOME* SEEDS EVEN THE CRUEL PYTHARIAN SUN CANNOT SUPPRESS. SEEDS OF ANGER, HATRED...AND *REVENGE*...

HE WAITS FOR ME THERE, HIDING BEHIND WALLS OF STONE. AND BEHIND WALLS OF STONE--

--HE SHALL *DIE!*

DEATH AT DARKMORN

An Adventure In Heroic Fantasy By:

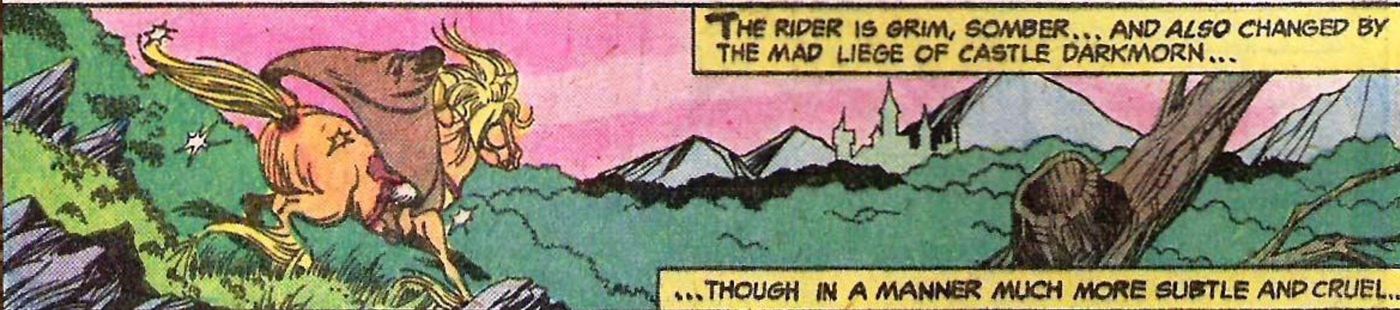
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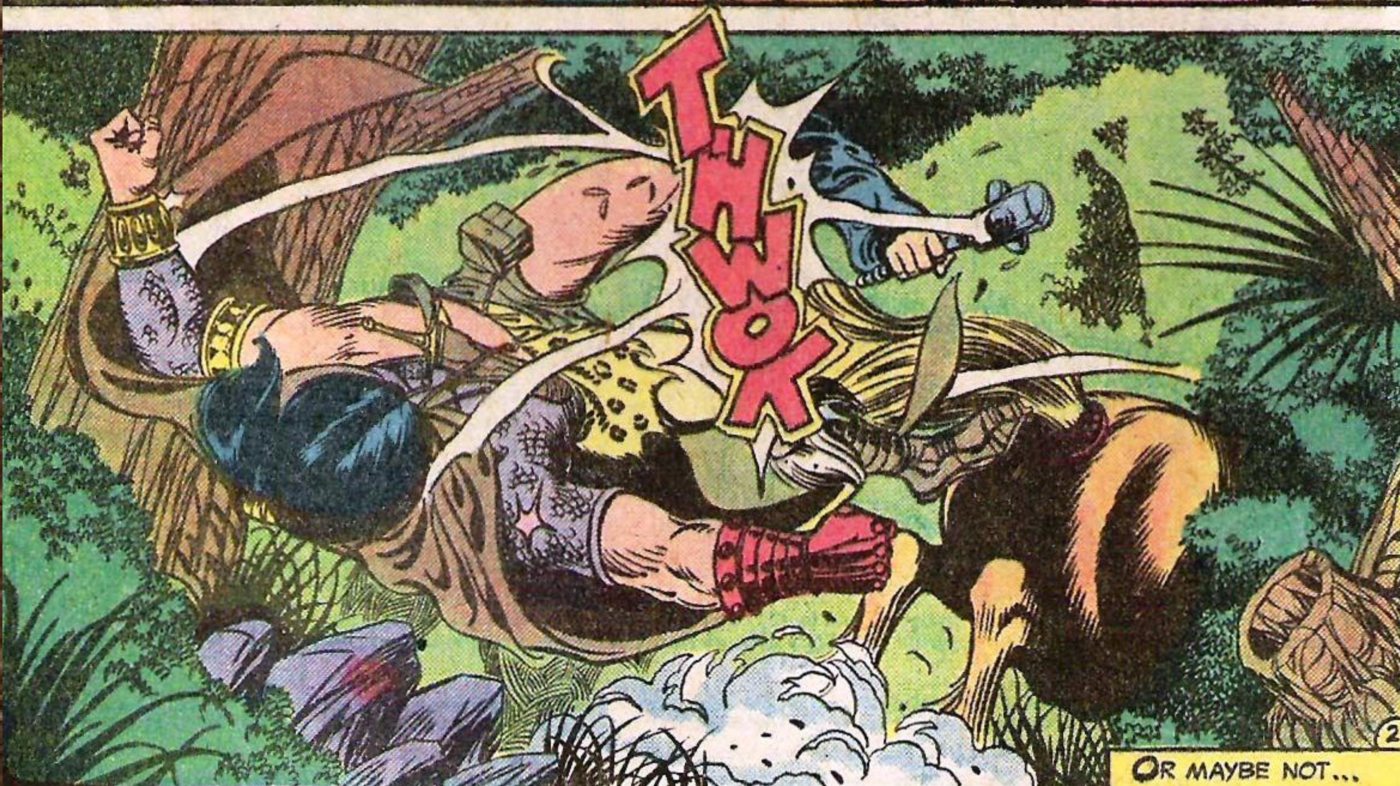
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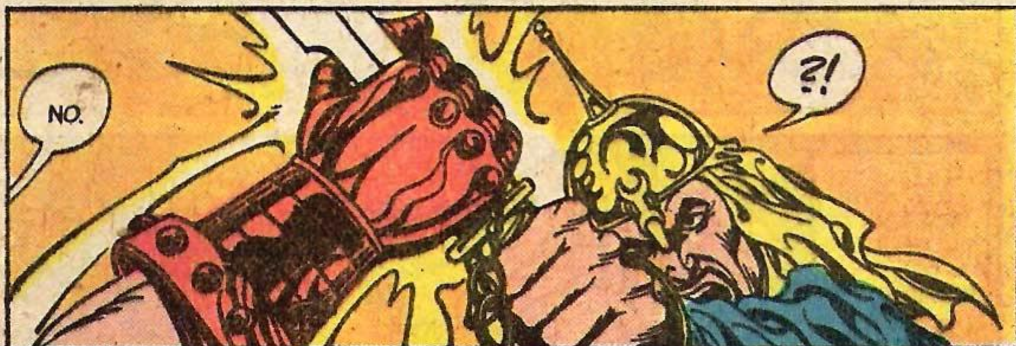

THE HORSE IS GOLDEN, SLEEK, UNNATURAL... CHANGED BY DARK CHAOS-FORCES UNLEASHED UPON THE WORLD BY THE MERCILESS KING OCCULAS...

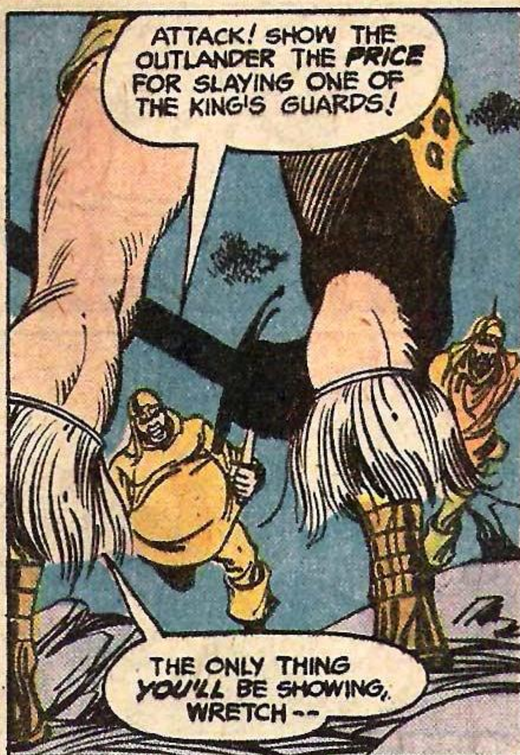

THE RIDER IS GRIM, SOMBER... AND *ALSO* CHANGED BY THE MAD LIEGE OF CASTLE DARKMORN...
...THOUGH IN A MANNER MUCH MORE SUBTLE AND CRUEL...


FOR THIS WARRIOR'S AIMLESS WANDERING HAS BEEN GIVEN *PURPOSE* IN THE LEARNING THAT OCCULAS WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEATHS OF PARENTS HE NEVER KNEW...
...A KNOWLEDGE THAT CURLS HIS SOUL LIKE A WITHERING WIND AND SOURS HIS MOUTH WITH AN ACID THIRST FOR *VENGEANCE*...
...A THIRST THAT WILL SOON BE JUSTLY, AND VIOLENTLY, FULFILLED...


THWOK
2
OR MAYBE NOT...


THE AMBUSH WORKED, CAPTAIN! KING OCCULAS WILL BE PLEASED THAT WE'VE BROUGHT DOWN THE LONG-HAIRED ASSASSIN HE WARNED WAS APPROACHING!

AYE, DROFFAG, LET THE ENTIRE GUARD TAKE THE CREDIT-- BUT LET THE BONUS FOR THE CHURL'S HEAD--
--BE MINE ALONE!

NO.
?!

KRAK

ATTACK! SHOW THE OUTLANDER THE PRICE FOR SLAYING ONE OF THE KING'S GUARDS!
THE ONLY THING YOU'LL BE SHOWING, WRETCH--

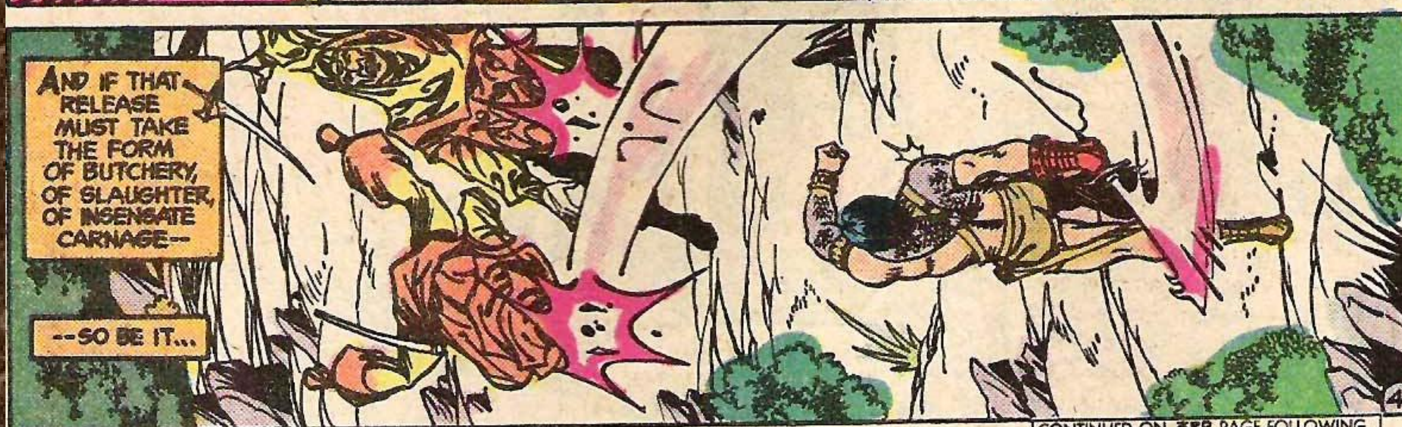
SWASH
--IS YOUR BLOOD!
3











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WHILE WATCHING FROM LOFTY PARAPETS ABOVE...

DAMN! I SEND MY ELITE PERSONAL GUARD AGAINST A SINGLE WARRIOR--AND HE MAKES THEM ALL LOOK LIKE RUNNY-NOSED SQUIRES!

I SUPPOSE THIS MEANS I'LL BE FORCED TO RELY ON ONE OF YOUR INCOMPETENT SPELLS AGAIN, WIZARD, SO BE QUICK AND--

I'LL DO NOTHING.

WHAT?!

I-I SAID I'LL DO NOTHING. Y-YOU'VE TREATED ME LIKE A C-COMMON LACKEY, A CHAMBER SERVANT! A-AND I'M AFRAID I'LL JUST HAVE NO MORE OF IT! Y-YOU FORGET WHO WIELDS THE P-POWER HERE--

POWER?! WHY YOU PUSILLANIMOUS MILKSOP, JUST WHAT GOOD DO YOU THINK POWER IS WITHOUT COURAGE?

BUT--

AYE, MIFTUNG, COURAGE! SOMETHING YOU HAVEN'T ENOUGH OF TO FACE YOUR OWN COWERING IMAGE IN A MIRROR WITHOUT HOLDING MY HAND!

BUT--

SILENCE!

YOU'LL CAST A SPELL TO KEEP THAT SCRUFFY BARBARIAN FROM ENTERING THE CASTLE-- NOW!

OR I'LL HAVE YOU HUNG BY YOUR WHISKERS FROM THE BANNER-POLES! IS THAT CLEAR?

B-BUT...I-I MEAN...I...

Y-YES, SIRE... -SIGH-

5


AND ON THE BLOOD-MUDDIED BATTLEFIELD BELOW, CLAW'S TIRELESS SWORDARM CONTINUES ITS ARCING DANCE OF DEADLY RUIN, BRINGING THE HALF-CRAZED SAVAGE EVER CLOSER TO THE COLD, FRIENDLESS WALLS OF DARKMORN...


WHEN SUDDENLY...
RRUMBLE
WHA--? TH-THE CASTLE! IT... IT'S GLOWING! QUIVERING! AND--


SKRRUTCH
GOD OF MERCY! I-IT'S RISING FROM THE GROUND!

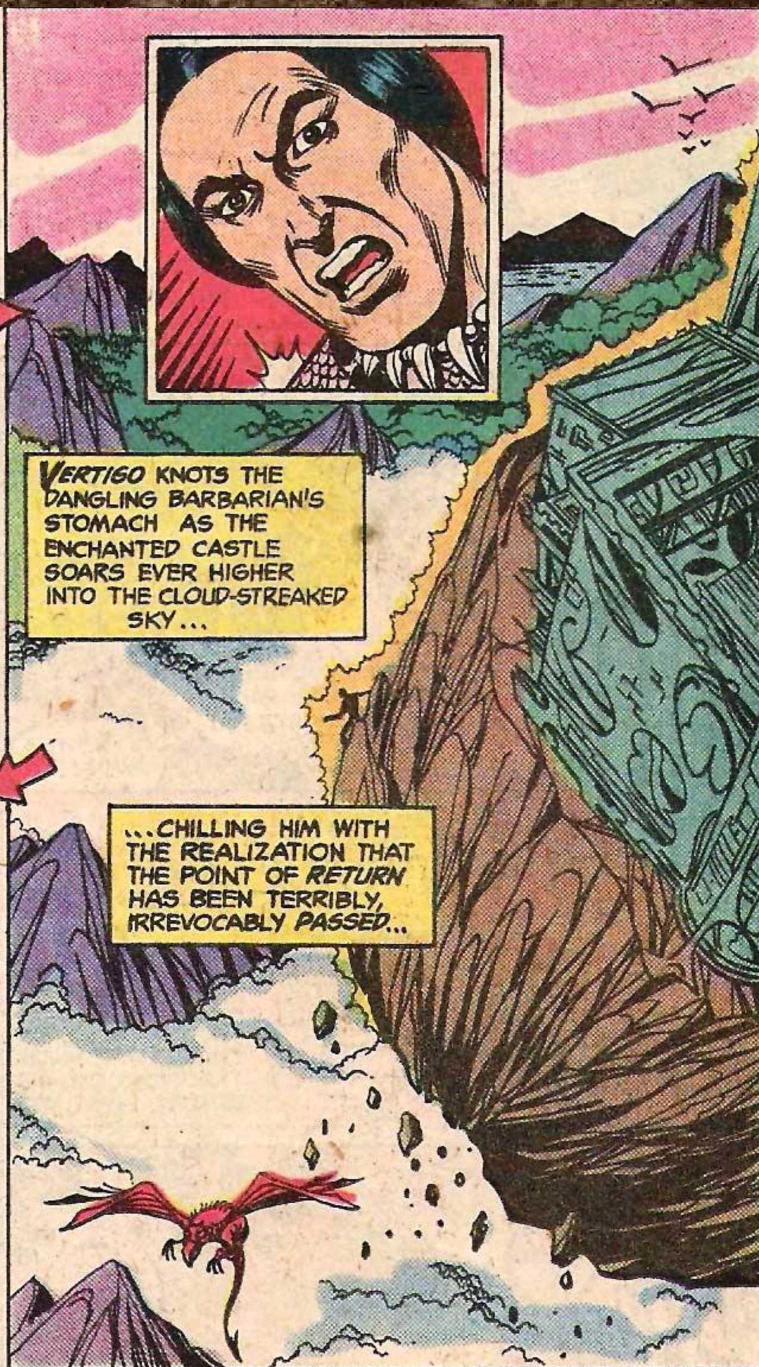

FOR THE SLENDEREST OF HEARTBEATS, CLAW CAN BUT WATCH AS HIS PREY SLIPS SLOWLY FROM HIS WOULD-BE GRASP LIKE GRAINS OF TIME-STOLEN SAND. AND THEN ...
NO...NO!

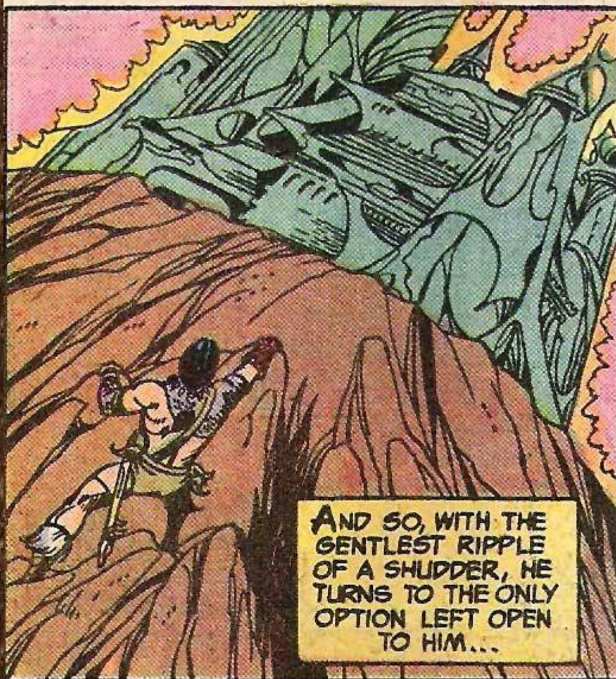

NO!
SLATCH!!!

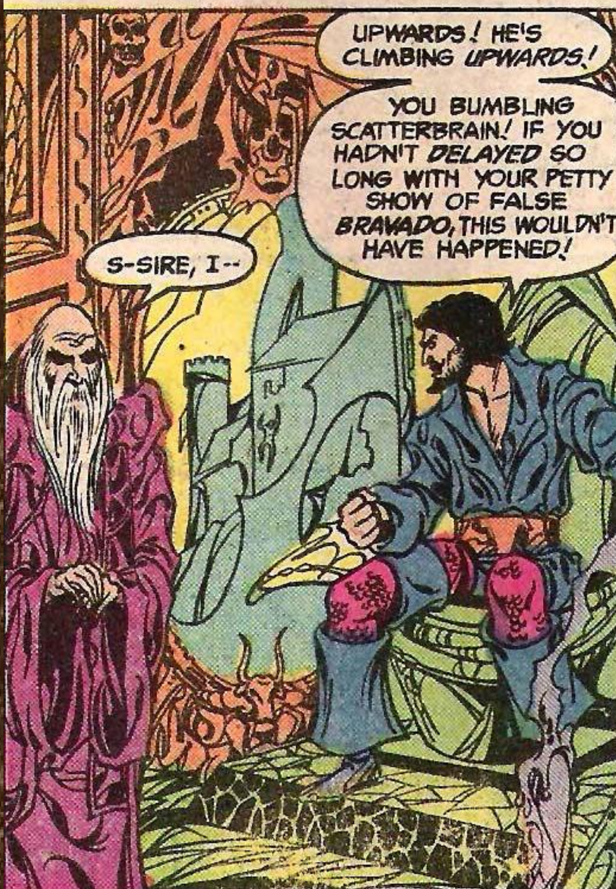

I'VE TRAVELED FAR TO BRING YOU JUSTICE, OCCULAS! FAR AND LONG!


AND I SWEAR BY MY IMMORTAL SOUL--

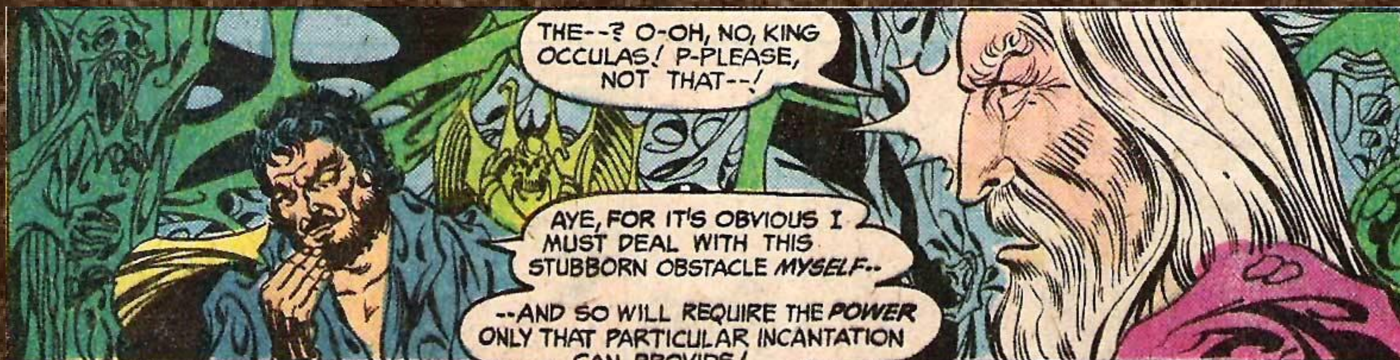

--I'LL NOT BE STOPPED NOW!
THAP


VERTIGO KNOTS THE DANGLING BARBARIAN'S STOMACH AS THE ENCHANTED CASTLE SOARS EVER HIGHER INTO THE CLOUD-STREAKED SKY...
...CHILLING HIM WITH THE REALIZATION THAT THE POINT OF RETURN HAS BEEN TERRIBLY, IRREVOCABLY PASSED...


AND SO, WITH THE GENTLEST RIPPLE OF A SHUDDER, HE TURNS TO THE ONLY OPTION LEFT OPEN TO HIM...


UPWARDS! HE'S CLIMBING UPWARDS!
YOU BUMBLING SCATTERBRAIN! IF YOU HADN'T DELAYED SO LONG WITH YOUR PETTY SHOW OF FALSE BRAVADO, THIS WOULDN'T HAVE HAPPENED!
S-SIRE, I--

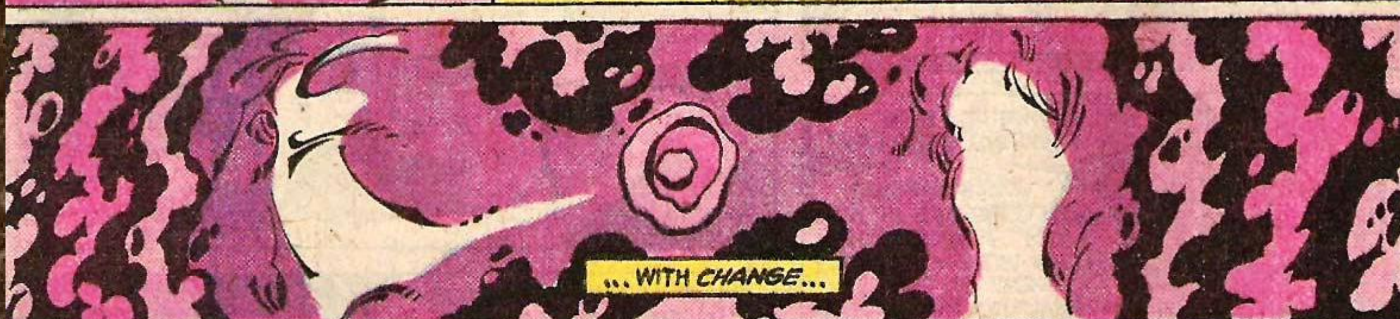

OH, STILL YOUR TIMOROUS BLATHERINGS! THE WINDOW THAT OUTLANDER APPROACHES LEADS TO THE HALL OF CANDLES!
LET US JUST HOPE THE GUARDIANS YOU'VE PLANTED THERE DETAIN HIM LONG ENOUGH TO CAST...THE SPELL OF TRANSMUTATION!
7

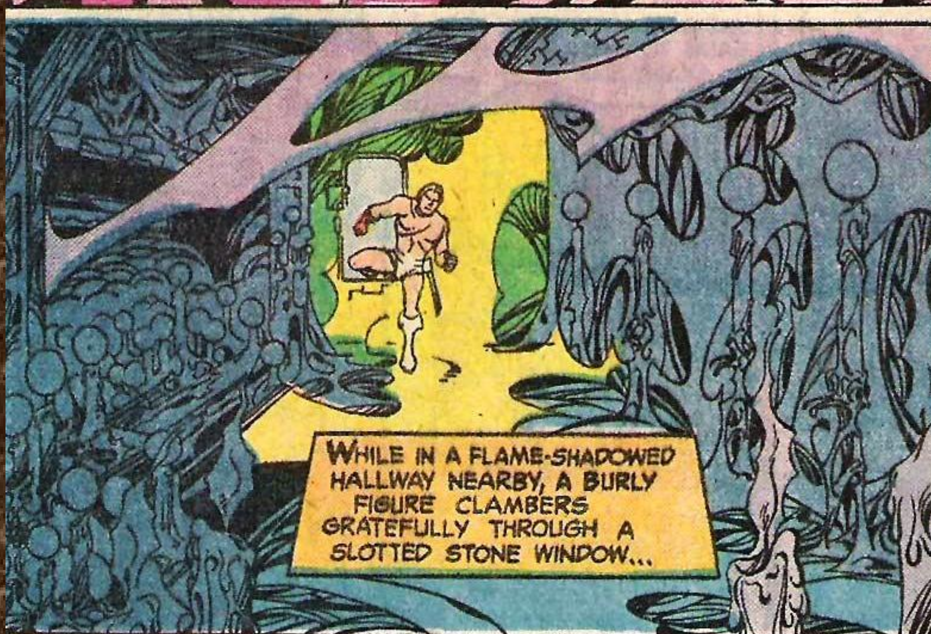










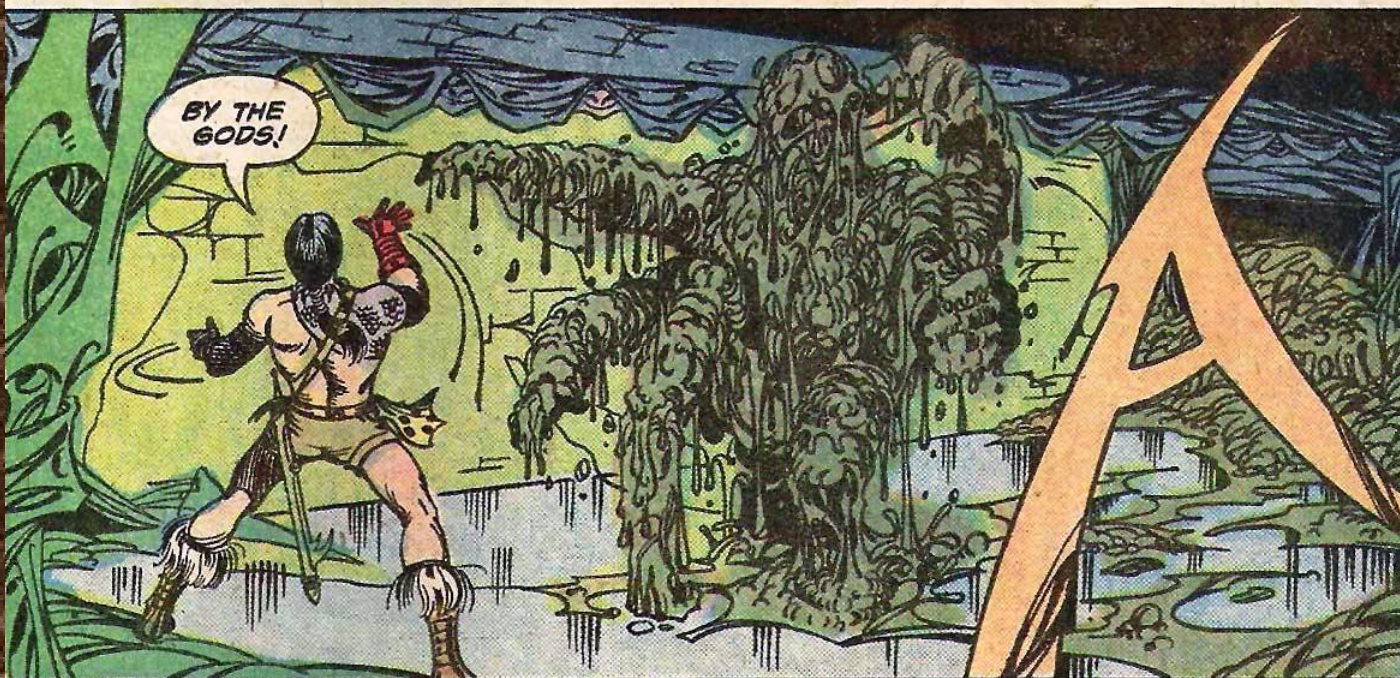




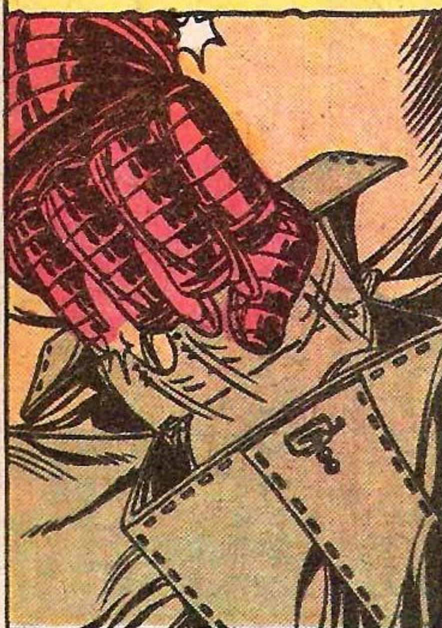
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...UNAWARE OF THE "GUARDIAN" TO WHOM THE YELLOW-EYED KING HAD EARLIER ALLUDED...
...UNAWARE OF THE STREAMS OF MELTING WAX THAT BLEND, FORM--AND GROW--AT HIS BACK...


UNAWARE, THAT IS, UNTIL...
WHA--?


BY THE GODS!


WITH THE FLEETNESS OF REFLEX, CLAW'S GAUNTLETED HAND DARTS TO THE LEATHERN POUCH AT HIS SIDE--
9


--GRASPS A TRIO OF CUTTING-EDGED CRYSTAL DISCS--


--AND SENDS THEM LANCING JAGGEDLY THROUGH THE TOWERING TALLOW-MONSTER'S HEAD...

















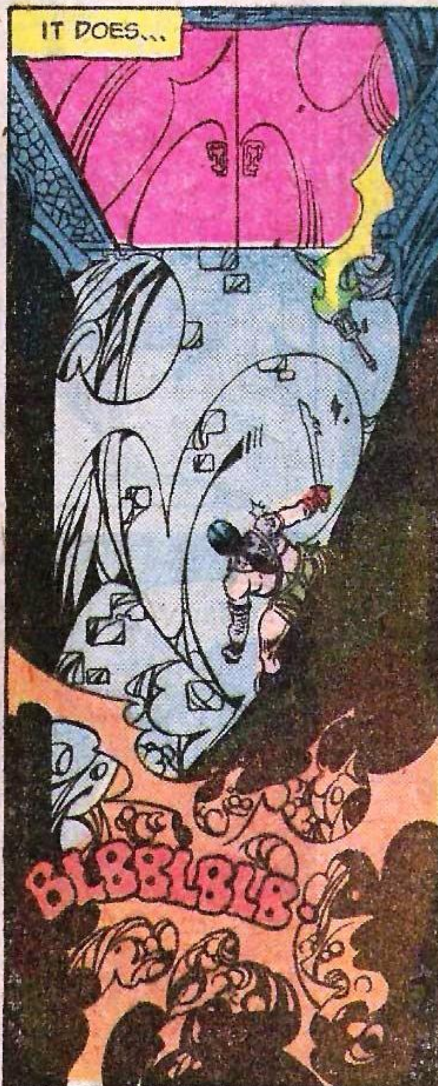
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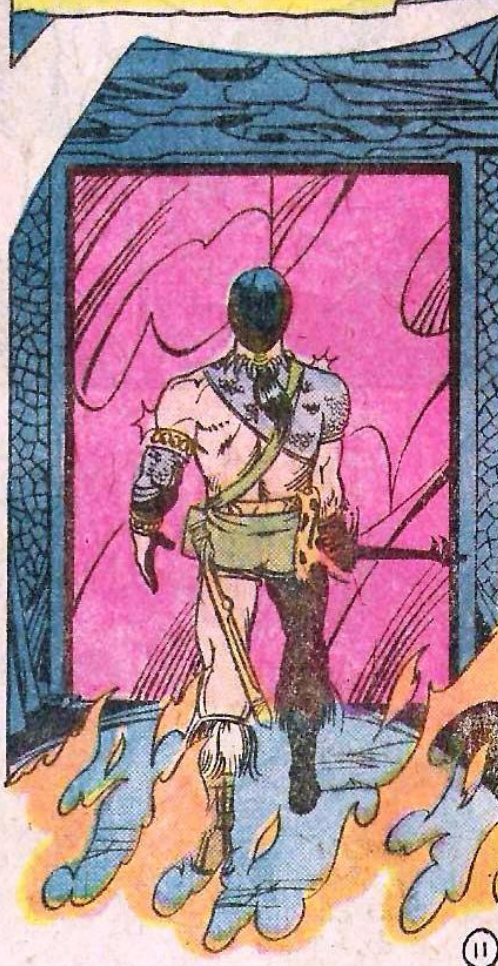

GLOWING LIKE A MASS OF PALLID BILE, THE TALLOW-MONSTER GLIDES FORWARD TO HOVER OVER THE SHAKEN BARBARIAN, POISING FOR THE DEATH-BLOW...


...A BLOW THAT NEVER FALLS, AS A CRIMSON GAUNTLET FLASHES OUT, CLUTCHES FRANTICALLY...


AND JERKS DOWNWARD IN THE DESPERATE HOPE THAT WHERE A SINGLE PITCH-FLARING TORCH HAS FAILED, A FIERY BULK OF FLAME-ENGULFED TAPESTRY--


--MIGHT SUCCEED...
SSSSSSSSS


IT DOES...
BLBBLBLB!


STOICALLY, ALMOST HESITANTLY, CLAW ACCEPTS THE OUTCOME. FOR HE KNOWS THAT THOUGH A SKIRMISH HAS BEEN WON--
11

--THE *FINAL BATTLE* YET AWAITS!

YOU... ARE *OCCULAS?!*

AYE, LORD CLAW. THOUGH I APOLOGIZE IF YOU FIND MY *APPEARANCE* SOMEWHAT *OFFENSIVE*. YOU SEE, I *ANTICIPATED* THIS LITTLE ENCOUNTER--

--AND SO HAD MY *MAN* HERE SUPPLY ME WITH A SUITABLE... *ADVANTAGE!*

I KNOW NOT WHAT MANNER OF SORCERY YOUR ALLY PROVIDES, MURDERER, NOR DO I *CARE!*

FOR NOT ALL THE DEMONS OF THE *SEVEN HELLS* CAN SAVE YOU NOW!

OH, REALLY?

SKAWNG

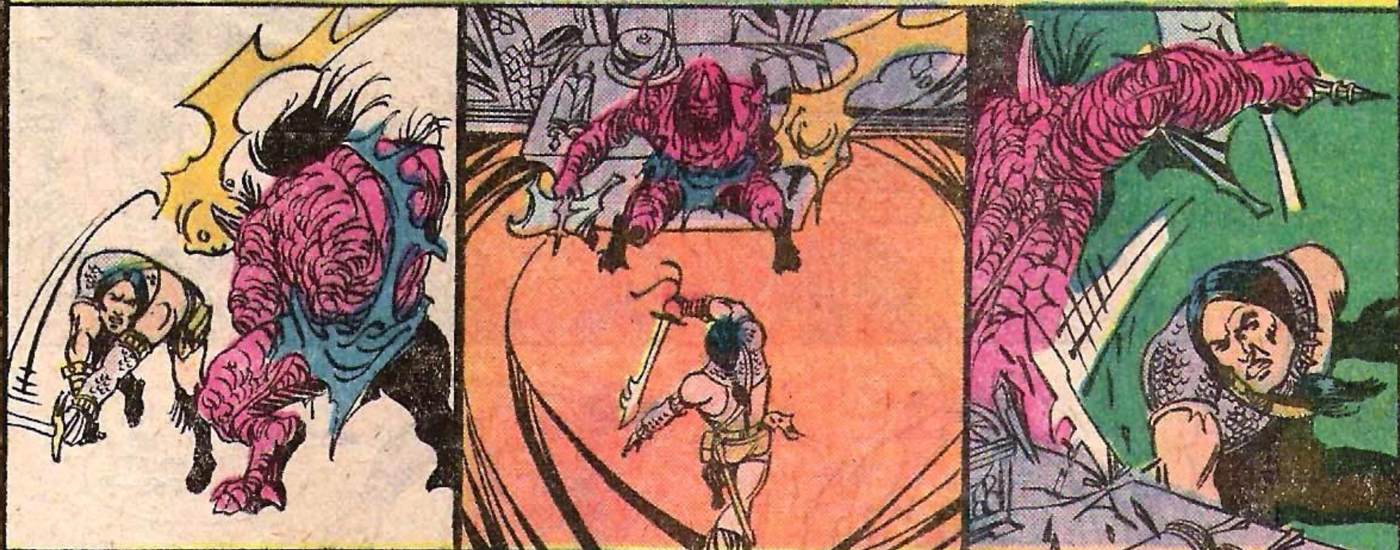
DO TELL!

BASH

12

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A PUSTULE OF PENT-UP FURY ERUPTS IN CLAW'S SOUL, SENDING HIS MIGHTY BLADE SCREAMING FORWARD IN A TORRENT OF THRUSTS AND LUNGES TO DAZZLE EVEN OCCULAS' SUPERNATURALLY-AUGMENTED FORM...



BUT, AS IN MOST CASES WHERE A PASSION RULES THE MIND, ANGER IS OFT ACCOMPANIED BY--



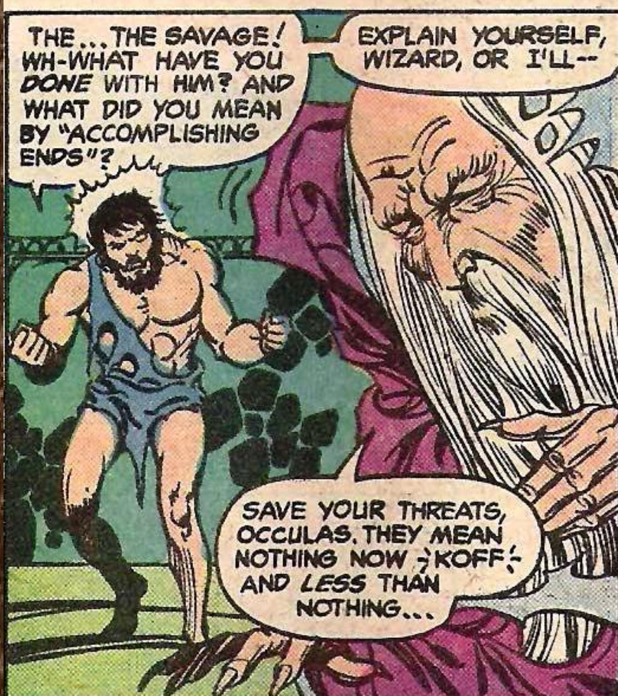








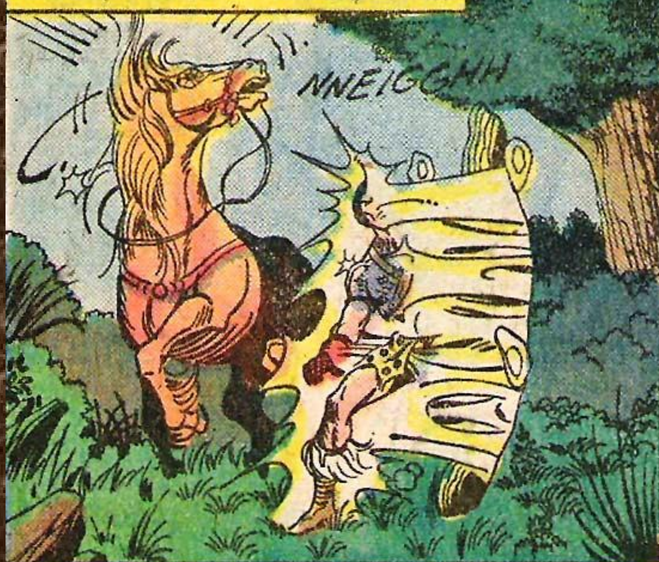

AND FOR THAT...
...I THANK YOU...
...MY FRIEND...

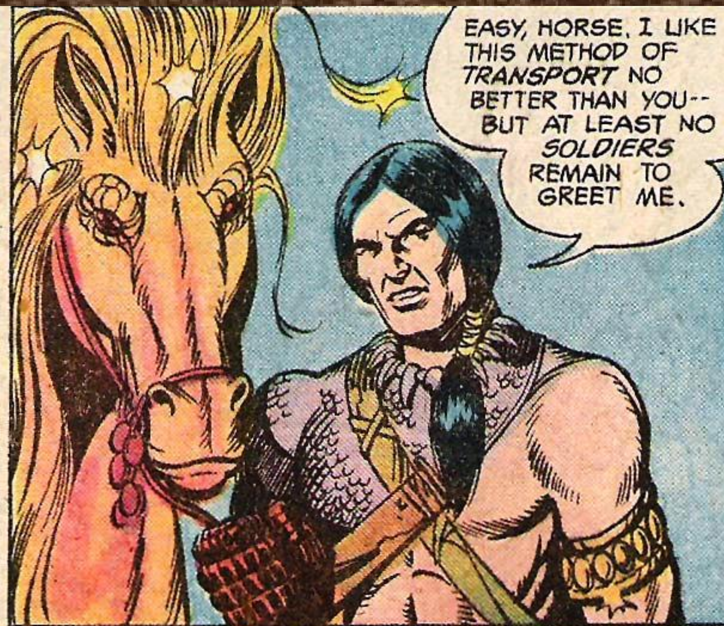

THE... THE SAVAGE! WH-WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH HIM? AND WHAT DID YOU MEAN BY "ACCOMPLISHING ENDS"?
EXPLAIN YOURSELF, WIZARD, OR I'LL--
SAVE YOUR THREATS, OCCULAS. THEY MEAN NOTHING NOW -KOFF- AND LESS THAN NOTHING...

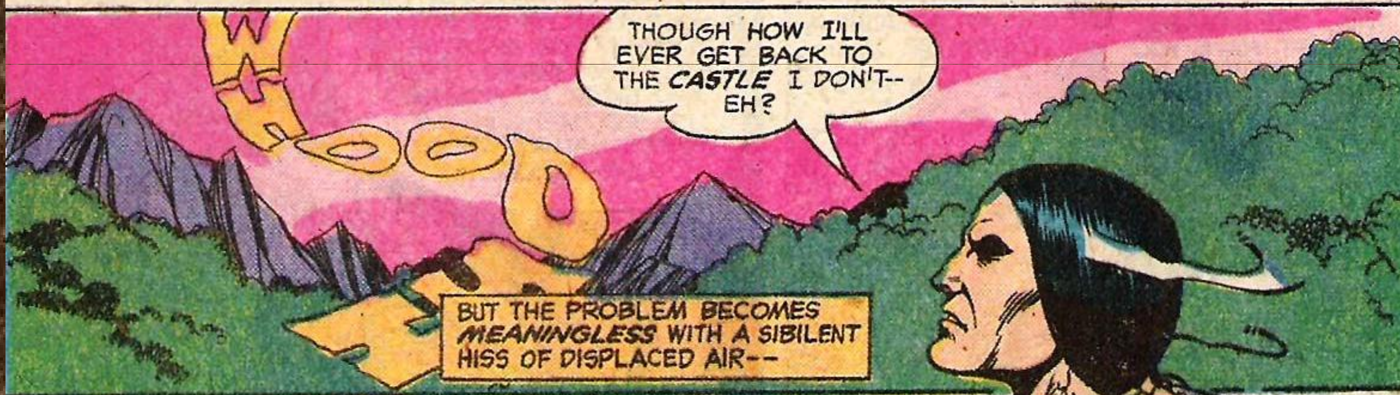

YOUR RULE OF OPPRESSION IS OVER! FOR BECAUSE OF YOU, I AM DYING! -KOFF- AND SINCE MY POWER LIES ROOTED... IN THE MYSTIC NATURE OF MY LIFE-FORCE...

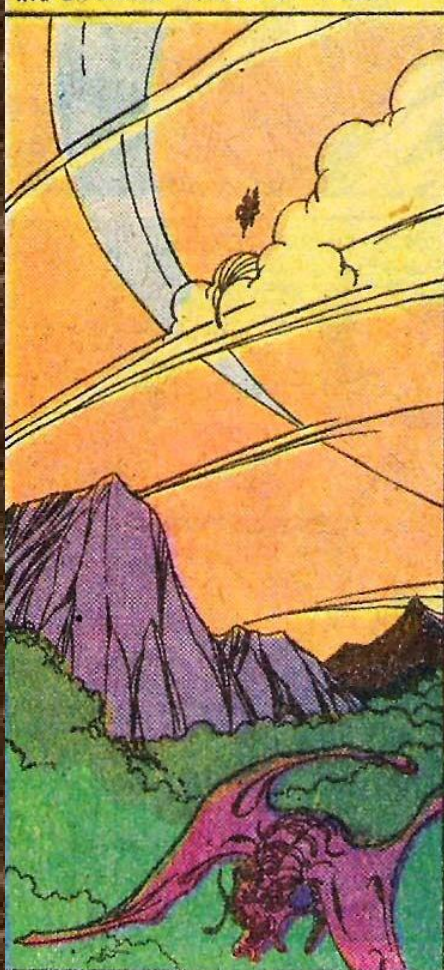

...WHEN I DIE... SO DO MY SPELLS... HEH HEH HEUUHHNNN
LIKE A COMFORTING MIST, DEATH SOFTENS THE AGING WIZARD'S FACE... AS THE CHEERLESS STONE WALLS OF CASTLE DARKMORN BEGIN TO TREMBLE...

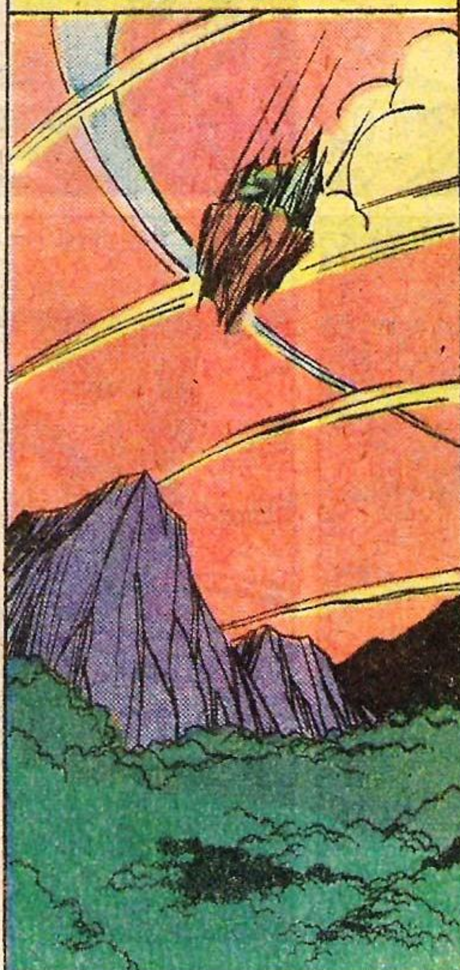

...AND THE EYES OF A ONCE-OMNIPOTENT KING WIDEN IN A BELATED SWELL OF APPALLED REALIZATION...
ALL... SPELLS...?
15













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--NIGHTMARE'S END!

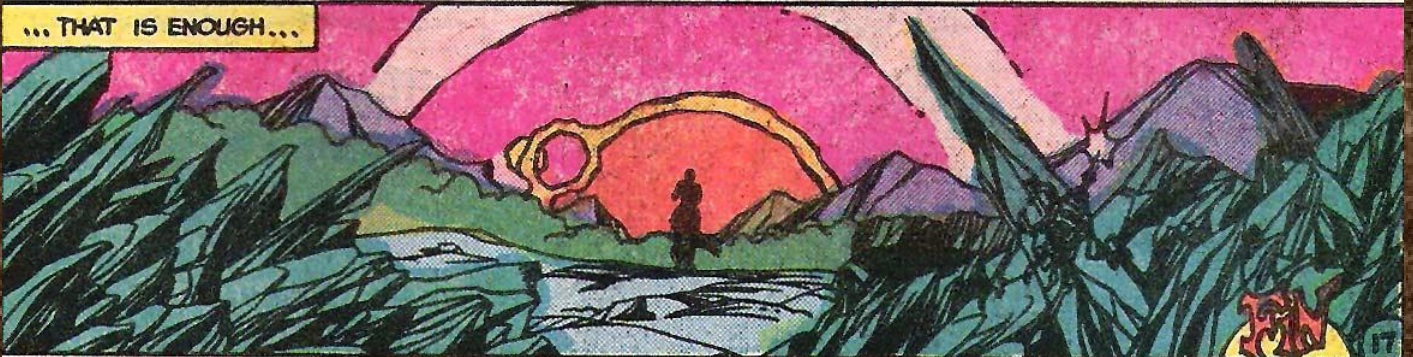
CHRAKA-BALOOM



SMOKE SETTLES, CLATTERING RUBBLE FALLS STILL... AND A FROST-EYED WARRIOR STANDS WATCHING THE RESULTANT DEBRIS, SCOWLING...

FOR THE SUDDEN RUSH OF EXHILARATION, THE THRILL OF VICTORY, ELUDES HIM...





NEXT ISSUE ON SALE DURING THE SECOND WEEK IN MAY

CLAW THE UNCONQUERED

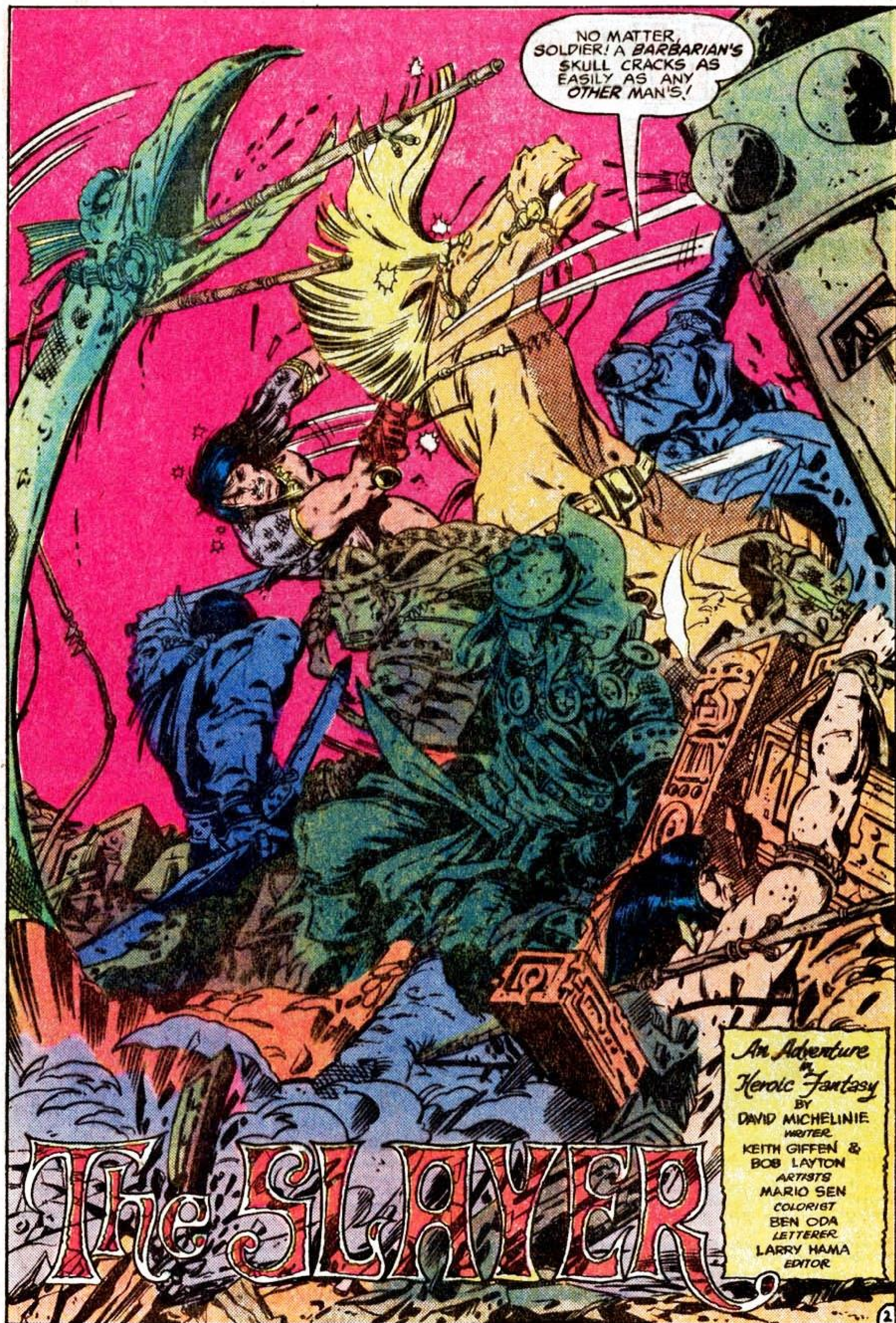
IN A WORLD FAR FROM THIS ONE--YET CLOSER THAN ONE MIGHT IMAGINE--THERE IS AN OLD SAYING TO THE EFFECT THAT "WHAT A PERSON DOESN'T KNOW WON'T HURT HIM..."

HOWEVER, HERE, A DARK-MANED BARBARIAN NAMED CLAW RIDES SOMBERLY, UNAWARE OF A LONG-STANDING BORDER WAR BETWEEN THE NEIGHBORING PROVINCES OF BOSKE AND KYFIRTH...

...AND THAT IS AN IGNORANCE WHICH WILL SOON CAUSE HIM MORE THAN MERE PAIN...

HO, CAPTAIN--AN OUTLANDER! THE KYFIRTHIAN SCUM RANGE FAR IN RECRUITING THEIR MERCENARIES!

CLAW THE UNCONQUERED, Vol. 3, No. 12, Aug./Sept., 1978. Published bi-monthly by DC COMICS INC., 75 Rockefeller Plaza, New York. N.Y. 10019.


NO MATTER, SOLDIER! A BARBARIAN'S SKULL CRACKS AS EASILY AS ANY OTHER MAN'S!
An Adventure in Heroic Fantasy BY DAVID MICHELINIE WRITER KEITH GIFFEN & BOB LAYTON ARTISTS MARIO SEN COLORIST BEN ODA LETTERER LARRY HAMA EDITOR
The SLAYER
2


BY SHAKA'S BONES! I KNOW NOT WHAT SQUABBLE THESE DOGS WOULD DRAW ME INTO, BUT IF IT'S BLOOD THEY WANT--


--'TIS BLOOD THEY'LL GET!


WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR, BLAST IT! KILL THE CUR! HE'S ONLY A BARBARIAN!
YOUR WORDS ARE BRAVE, BOSKEN--


--THEY'LL LOOK MOST IMPRESSIVE WHEN ETCHED ON YOUR GRAVESTONE!
EEHYAAGH!


AND THUS THE BATTLE RAGES--
CLOSE RANKS! CLOSE RANKS, DAMN YOU!
P-PLEASE! I-I CAN'T SEE!
MY LEG! H-HE'S CUT OFF MY LEG!
GYYAAHHH
3


--UNTIL...
SOTH! THE LOUT'S CARCASS HOLDS MY SWORD! LET GO, YOU LEATHERY CUR! LET G--


ALAS, LONGHAIR, 'TWOULD SEEM YOUR FORTUNE HAS RUN OUT FOR THE DAY! PITY...


...I'VE CAUGHT GLIMPSES OF YOUR FIGHTING-- AND FIND YOUR SKILL QUITE IMPRESSIVE! IN FACT, I'D SAY THAT YOU WERE THE SINGLE FACTOR THAT'S TURNED THE BATTLE AGAINST US!
SO IT DOES SEEM UNJUST TO SKEWER YOU LIKE A SNARED RABBIT!


THEREFORE, I WON'T! AFTER ALL, THERE HAS TO BE SOME HONOR AMONG WARRIORS, EH? EVEN BETWEEN ENEMIES!


FAREWELL, LONGHAIR! PERHAPS ONE DAY I'LL HAVE THE CHANCE TO KILL YOU UNDER MORE REPUTABLE CIRCUMSTANCES! HA HA HA!
FOR A MOMENT, CLAW STANDS PUZZLED--FOR HE IS NOT ACCUSTOMED TO GALLANTRY AMONG KILLERS...
4


... GENERALLY, FOR GOOD REASON...
I DON'T KNOW WHERE YOU CAME FROM, OUTLANDER, BUT NO ONE ASKED FOR YOUR HELP!
AYE, SO DON'T GO EXPECTING A SHARE OF THE EARS!


EARS...?
THAT'S RIGHT. WE HIRE OUT FROM THE BARRACKS AT SAFHADDE FIGHTING FOR KYFIRTH!
AND THEY PAY 50 GOLD PIECES FOR EVERY LEFT EAR FROM A SOLDIER WE BRING IN!


AYE, IT'S GOOD MONEY--
--ESPECIALLY SINCE THEY'RE NOT TOO PARTICULAR AS TO WHERE THE EARS COME FROM...




WHA--?! H-HE SLEW TYMRYN... WITHOUT EVEN LOOKING!
L-LIKE HIS HAND MOVED OF ITS OWN ACCORD!


AYE, IT SEEMS THIS DAMNABLE SHEATH OF METAL CONTINUES TO PROTECT ME--
--WHETHER I WANT THAT PROTECTION OR NOT!
5


THE FOUR GAPING MERCENARIES KNOW NOT THE SOURCE OF THE GLITTERING GAUNTLET: THAT IT WAS GIVEN TO CLAW BY GODS TO SHIELD AGAINST THE INFLUENCE OF DEMON-BLOOD MANIFEST IN HIS RIGHT HAND...
THEY KNOW ONLY THAT BECAUSE OF THAT GAUNTLET, THEIR COMRADE LIES NEARBY IN A SLOWLY-SPREADING PUDDLE OF STILL-WARM GORE...


...AND APPARENTLY, THAT IS ENOUGH.
AYE! W-WE'RE MOST GRATEFUL!
H-HAVE SOME EARS?
UH, A-A-AS I WAS SAYING, FRIEND, Y-YOUR AID WAS GREATLY APPRECIATED!


AND SO, AS NIGHTFALL COMES TO THE KYFIRTHIAN BORDER...
I'M SURE YOU'LL FIND THIS WINE MOST INVIGORATING, WARRIOR. IT COMES FROM THE ROOST OF A MINOR WIZARD WE RECENTLY PLUNDERED, AND WAS ONE OF SEVERAL, UH--


--UNUSUAL ITEMS WE WERE ABLE TO OBTAIN...


WHA--BY THE GODS! THE SMOKE-- 'TIS ALIVE!
6

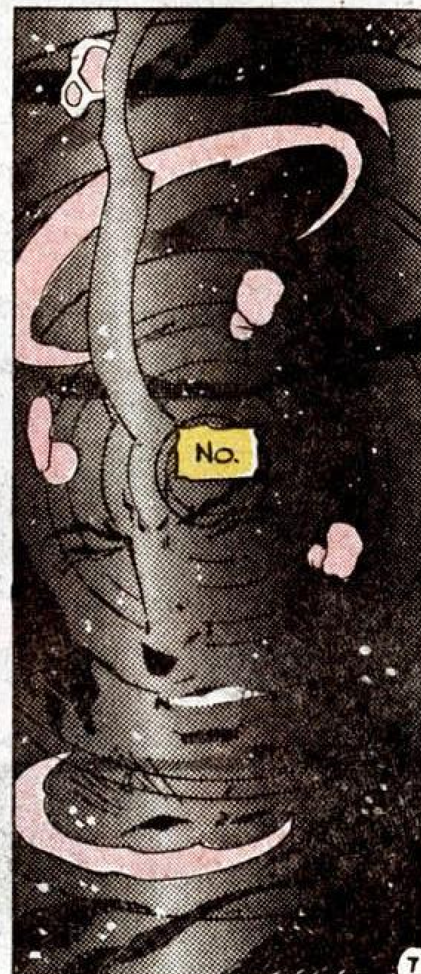

MY BLADE ⸗KOFF KOFF⸗ PASSING THROUGH THE ARMS... LIKE THEY WERE SHADOWS! ⸗KOFF⸗
C-CAN'T ⸗CHOKE⸗ BREATHE! C-CAN'T... ⸗KOFF⸗ ...CAN'T...

QUICKLY! GET THE GAUNTLET! HE WON'T BE OUT LONG!

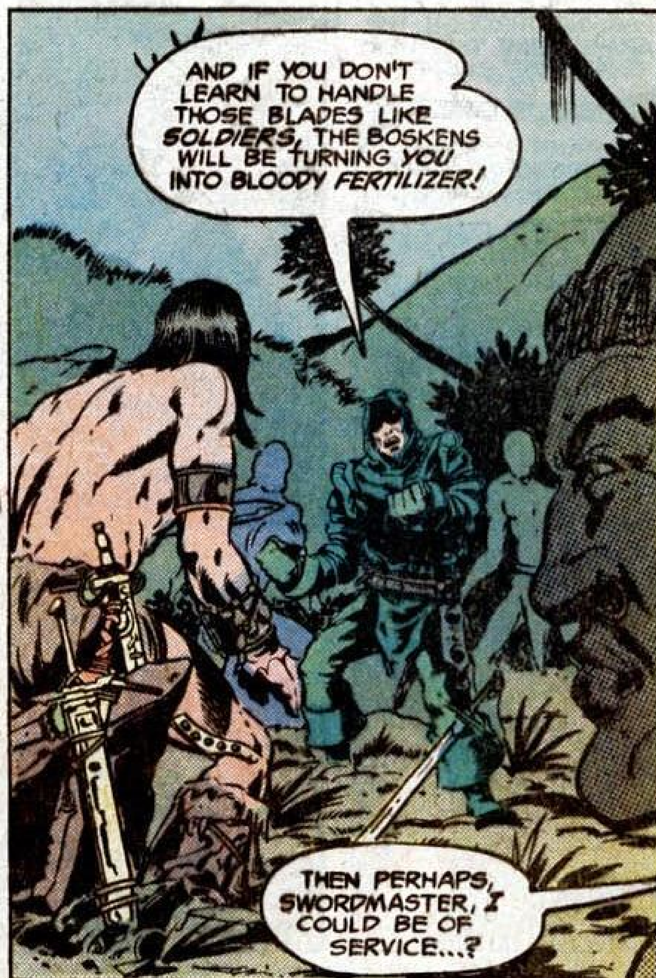
AYE, IF THIS METAL GLOVE REALLY DOES WHAT THE BARBARIAN SAYS, IT COULD MEAN OUR FORTUNE!
I-I'VE ALMOST ⸗UHN⸗ GOT IT--

WHA--⸗GASP!⸗
TH-THE HAND! HE... HE'S A DEMON!

AND AS THE TERRIFIED MERCENARIES FLEE--STILL CLUTCHING THEIR PRIZE--CLAW FIGHTS HIS WAY THROUGH AN UNNATURAL HAZE, WONDERING...

...IF IT'S WORTH THE EFFORT TO GIVE CHASE, TO PURSUE A LENGTH OF FIVE-FINGERED METAL THAT HAS REGULATED HIS LIFE LIKE A PUPPET-MASTER, ITS STRINGS MORE LIKE FETTERS THAN FRIENDS...
...AND IN THAT WONDERING, HE DECIDES...

No.
7





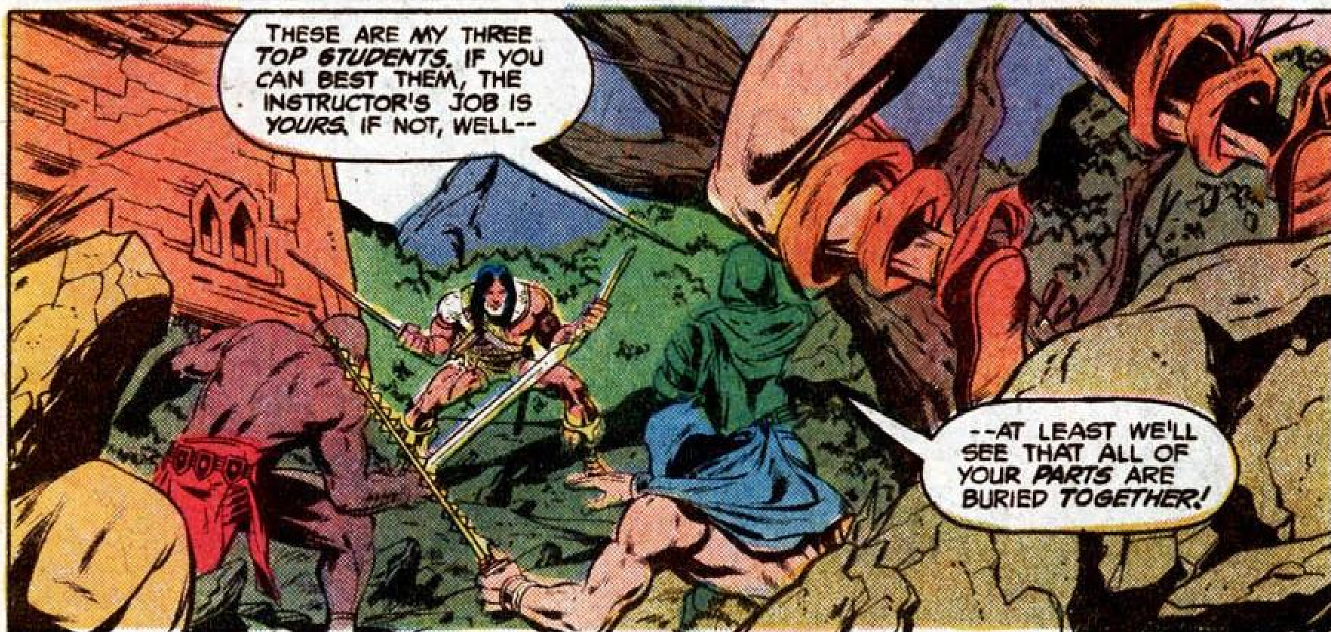




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THE STUDENTS ARE CONFIDENT, FOR THEY KNOW THEIR ABILITIES. WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW, HOWEVER, IS THAT THEIR OPPONENT WAS TRAINED NOT BY MORTALS--BUT BY GODS...







THEY DON'T KNOW THAT TO THE DARK-SCOWLED CLAW, THEIR THRUSTS ARE *PREDICTABLE,* THEIR PARRIES *INEFFECTUAL,* THEIR ATTACK A MERE *CHILD'S GAME...*









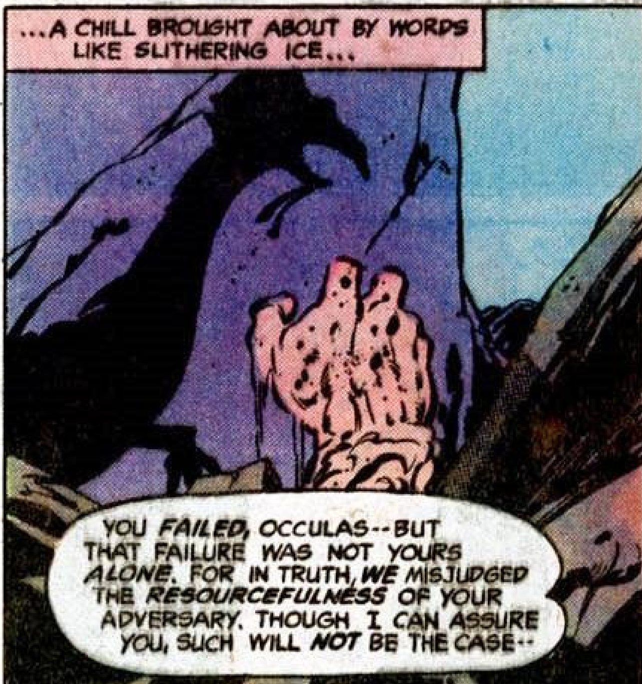




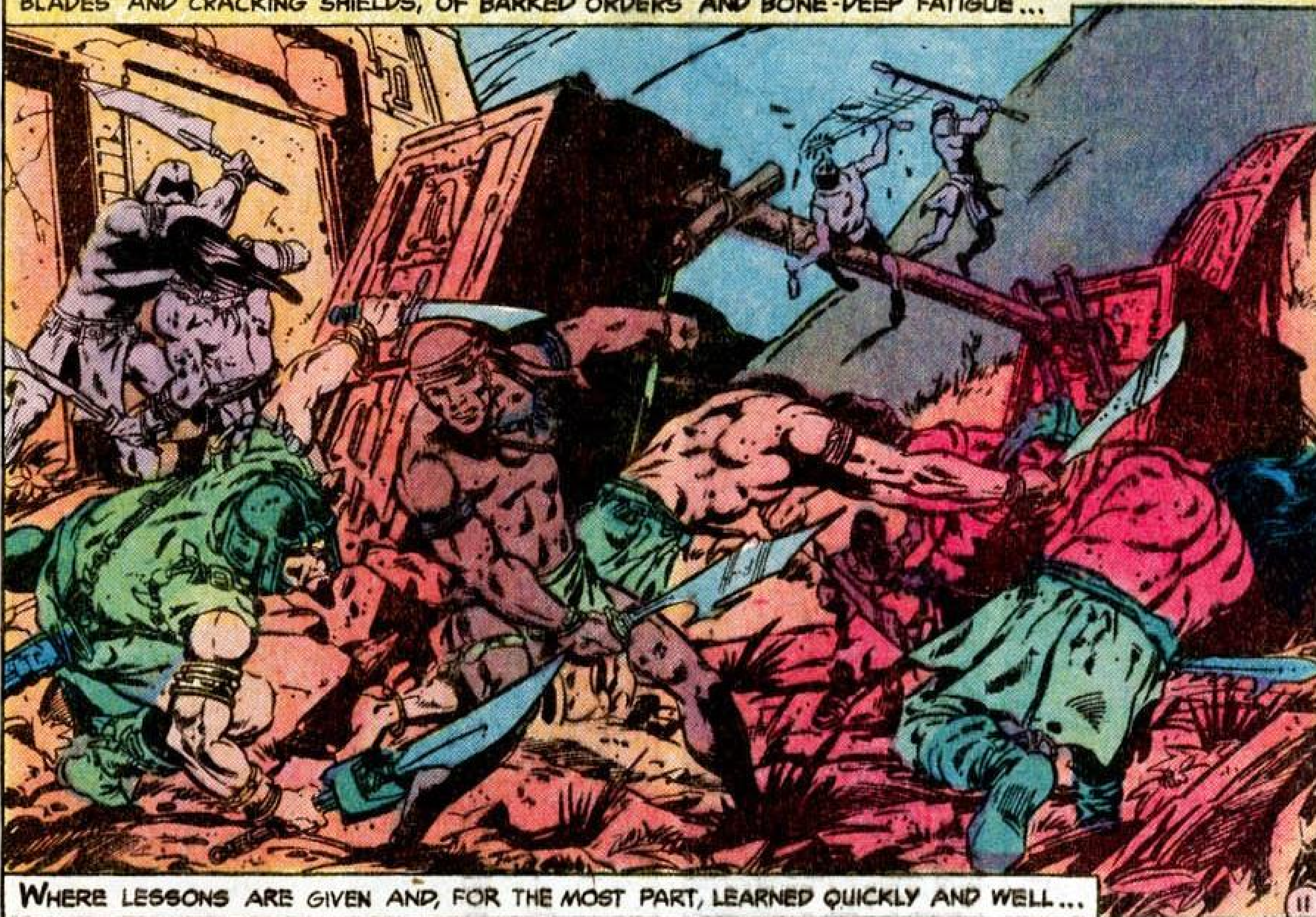


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BUT WHILE A COLD SHUDDER OF APPREHENSION QUIVERS CLAW'S SPINE, A CHILL OF A DIFFERENT SORT FALLS LEAGUES WESTWARD--
--OVER THE SCATTERED REMNANTS OF CASTLE DARKMORN...


...A CHILL BROUGHT ABOUT BY WORDS LIKE SLITHERING ICE...
YOU FAILED, OCCULAS--BUT THAT FAILURE WAS NOT YOURS ALONE. FOR IN TRUTH, WE MISJUDGED THE RESOURCEFULNESS OF YOUR ADVERSARY. THOUGH I CAN ASSURE YOU, SUCH WILL NOT BE THE CASE--


--THE NEXT TIME!


SAFHADDE: WHERE THE DAYS PASS SLOWLY, STREAMING TOGETHER INTO AN ENDLESS SERIES OF SLASHING BLADES AND CRACKING SHIELDS, OF BARKED ORDERS AND BONE-DEEP FATIGUE...
WHERE LESSONS ARE GIVEN AND, FOR THE MOST PART, LEARNED QUICKLY AND WELL...
11

















CONTINUED ON 3RD PAGE FOLLOWING.


...AS MOMENTS LATER...
IT'S AS I FEARED-- THE CURSE OF MY FATHERS IS NOW UPON ME!


WITHOUT THE GAUNTLET TO CONTAIN IT, THE INFLUENCE OF THIS DEMON HAND GROWS EVER STRONGER, FILLING ME WITH CRUELTY, EVIL... AND DISGUST!


BUT I STILL HAVE MY WILL, DAMN YOU! I'LL FIGHT! I'LL FIGHT AND I'LL WIN, DO YOU HEAR?
CLAW WILL PREVAIL!

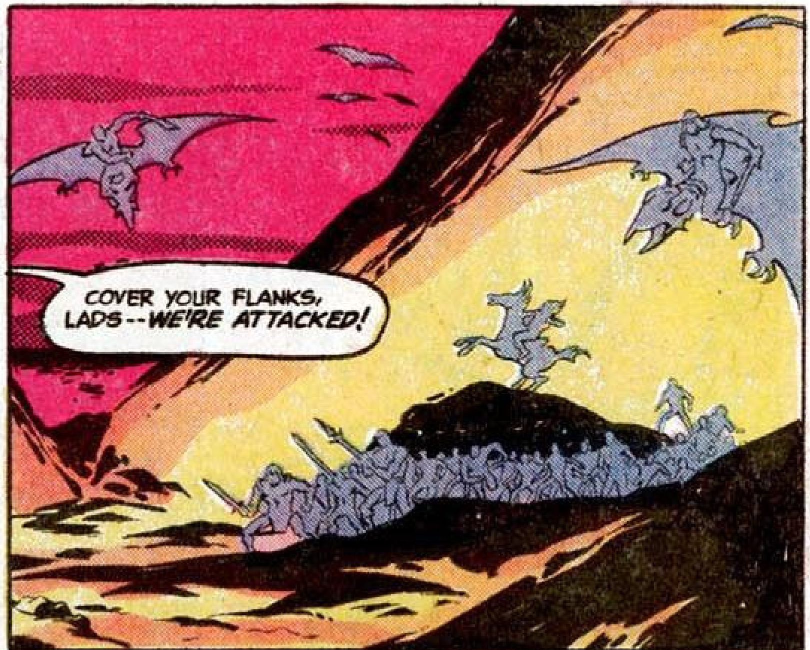

NEEDLESS TO SAY, SLEEP COMES UNEASILY THAT NIGHT... AND AS THE NEXT DAY BEGINS...
YOU'RE TO CHECK RUMORS OF ENEMY ACTIVITY ALONG THE WESTERN SHORE, CLAW. IT SHOULD PROVIDE AN EXCELLENT FIELD TEST FOR YOUR TRAINEES.


AND SO LEAGUES AND HOURS PASS... UNTIL FINALLY, AS THE DESTINATION IS REACHED...
KEEP SHARP EYES, LADS! THESE BOSKENS ARE CRAFTY DEVILS! THEY'RE LIABLE TO RESORT TO ANY--


--TRICK...?
13






COVER YOUR FLANKS, LADS--WE'RE ATTACKED!


THIS, THEN, IS WAR: THE TAKING OF LIFE FOR AN IDEAL, FOR CONQUEST--
--OR FOR THE JANGLE OF GOLD IN A FRESHLY-PLUNDERED PURSE ...


BUT FOR ONE WARRIOR, THE COMBAT SWIFTLY TAKES A MORE SINISTER TURN--
--AS EYES SWELL BLOATED WITH THE CRIMSON CALL OF BLOODLUST--


--AND HE HOPELESSLY, HELPLESSLY SURRENDERS TO THAT SUMMONS, BECOMING AT ONCE MORE THAN A MAN--
--YET LESS THAN HUMAN--


--AS HIS SLASHING SWORD SEEKS SATISFACTION IN WHATEVER UNFORTUNATE TARGET SHOULD STUMBLE UNWITTINGLY INTO HIS REACH, BE IT FOE--
14



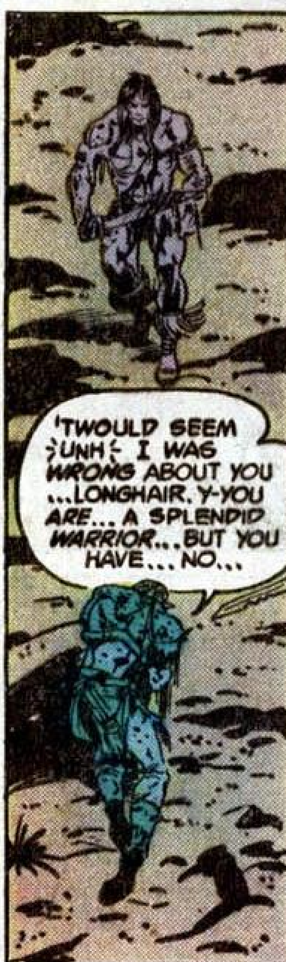
--LEAVING CLAW TO CONTINUE, UNAWARES, TO DRAW HIS FOUL-DRIPPING BLADE IN ITS SAVAGE ARC OF DEATH... AGAIN... YET AGAIN...









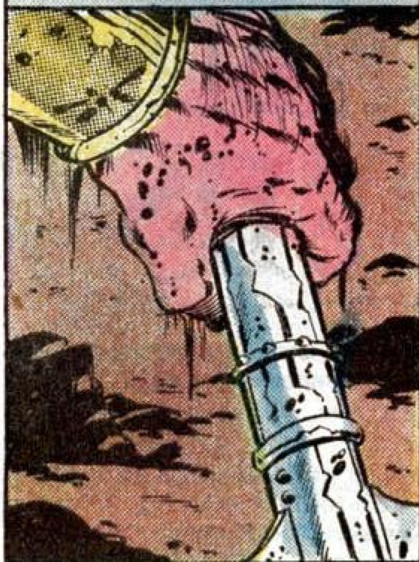






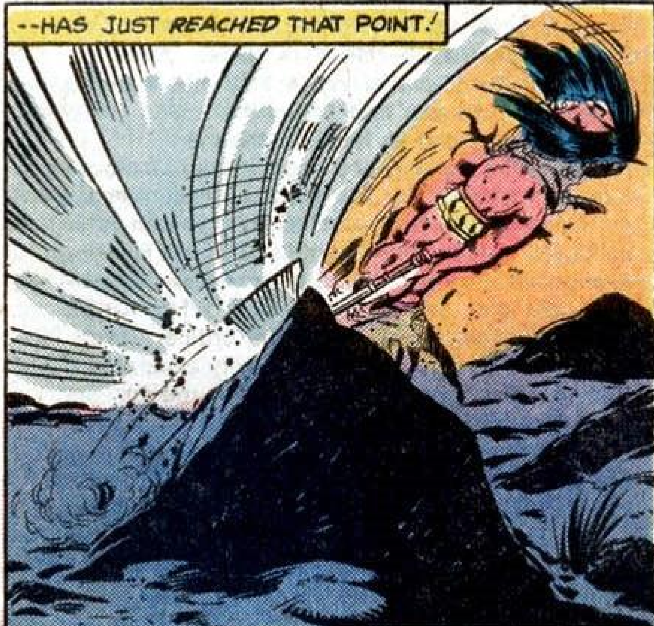


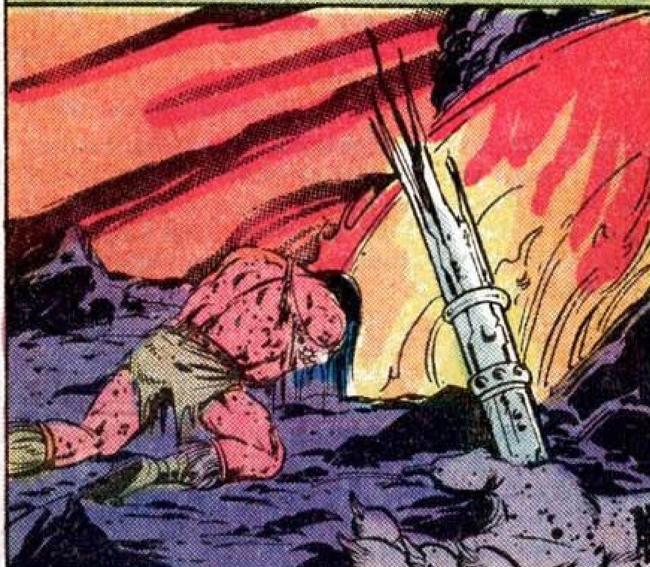
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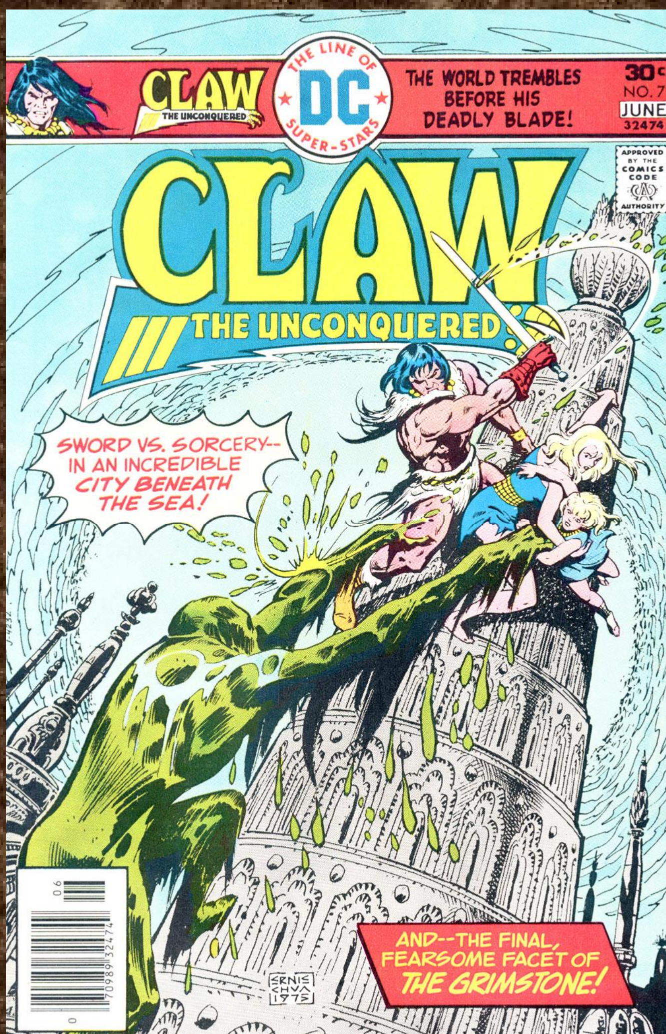


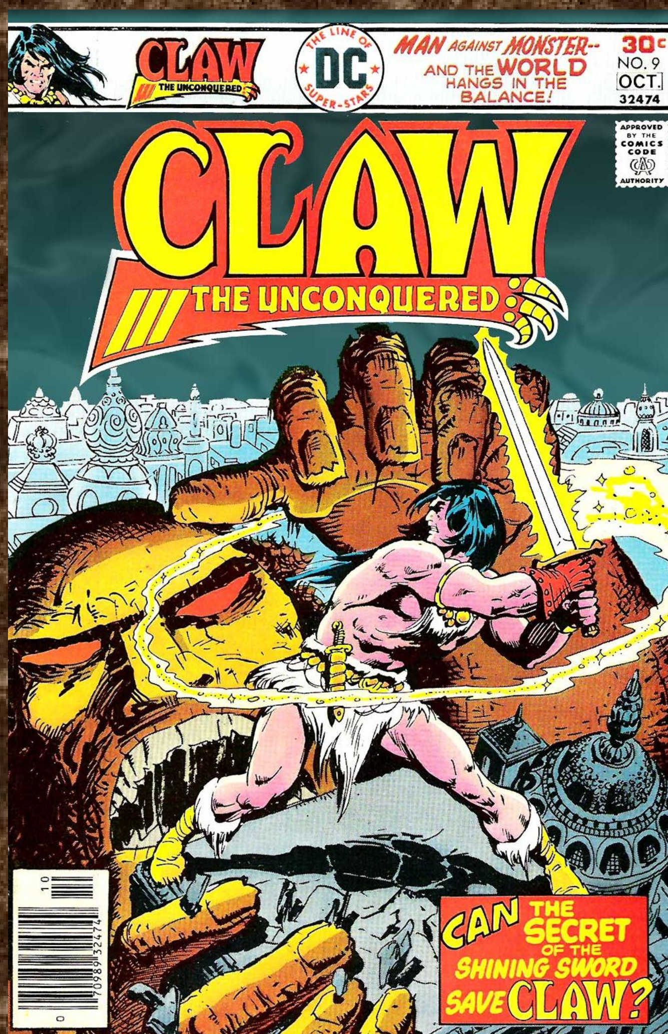




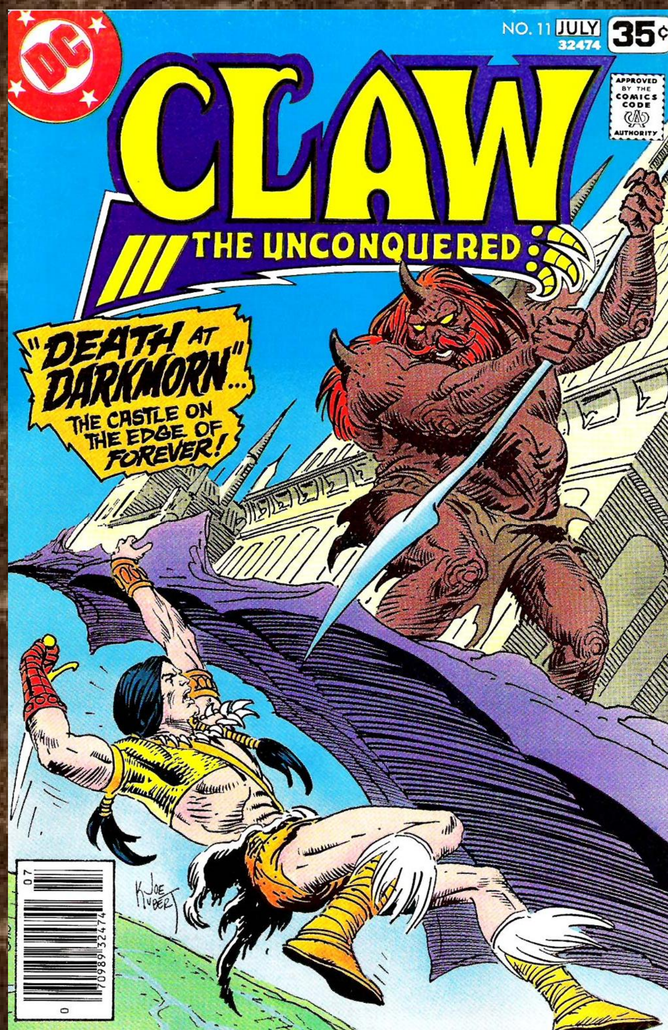


NEXT ISSUE ON SALE DURING THE SECOND WEEK IN JULY


CLAW THE UNCONQUERED
THE LINE OF DC SUPER-STARS
THE WORLD TREMBLES BEFORE HIS DEADLY BLADE!
30¢ NO. 7 JUNE 32474
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
CLAW THE UNCONQUERED
SWORD VS. SORCERY-- IN AN INCREDIBLE CITY BENEATH THE SEA!
AND--THE FINAL, FEARSOME FACET OF THE GRIMSTONE!


CLAW THE UNCONQUERED
THE LINE OF DC SUPER-STARS
MAN AGAINST MONSTER-- AND THE WORLD HANGS IN THE BALANCE!
30¢ NO. 9 OCT. 32474
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
CLAW THE UNCONQUERED
CAN THE SECRET OF THE SHINING SWORD SAVE CLAW?


DC
NO. 10 MAY 32474 35¢
CLAW THE UNCONQUERED
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
HE'S BACK!
THE MOST UNUSUAL SWORD & SORCERY HERO OF ALL!
AND TO CELEBRATE HIS RETURN-- HE MUST CHALLENGE... "THE EATER of SOULS!"


DC
NO. 11 JULY 32474 35¢
CLAW THE UNCONQUERED
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
"DEATH AT DARKMORN"... THE CASTLE ON THE EDGE OF FOREVER!



35¢

NO. 12

SEPT.

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

CLAW THE UNCONQUERED

YOU OWE ME YOUR LIFE CLAW...

...AND I'VE COME TO COLLECT!

JOE KUBERT

